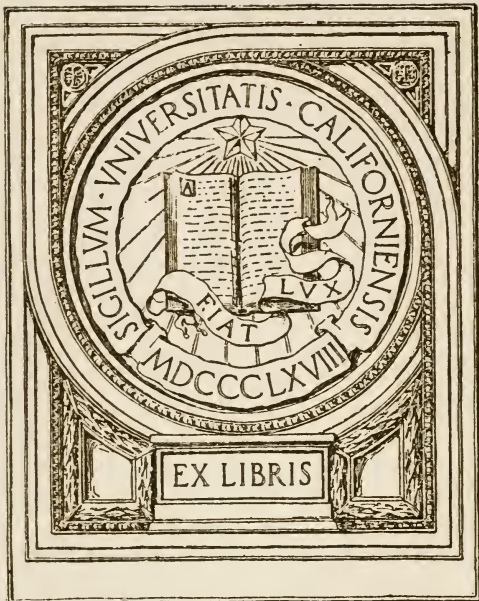


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REGINALD HETHEREGE
AND
LEIGHTON COURT

THE WORKS OF
HENRY KINGSLEY.

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN.
RAVENSHOE.

THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS.
SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

STRETTON.

AUSTIN ELLIOT *and* THE HARVEYS.
MADMOISELLE MATHILDE.

OLD MARGARET, *and* OTHER STORIES.
VALENTIN, *and* NUMBER SEVENTEEN.

OAKSHOTT CASTLE *and* THE GRANGE GARDEN.
REGINALD HETHEREGE *and* LEIGHTON COURT.
THE BOY IN GREY, *and* OTHER STORIES.



THE GHOST AT HOLLINGSCROFT
(From a Drawing by GORDON BROWNE.)

Reginald Hetherige.

[Page 160.]

REGINALD HETHEREGE

AND

LEIGHTON COURT

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY

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NEW EDITION

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY GORDON BROWNE

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REGINALD HETHEREGE

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REGINALD HETHEREGE.

CHAPTER I.

MR. DIGBY DOES THE BEST HE CAN UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

REGINALD HETHEREGE made so many failures, and accomplished such remarkable successes in his life, that the story of it would be worth telling, even had he, the principal character in it, no more moral value or capacity of expression than the buoy at the Nore ; to which most excellent arrangement of staves and iron hoops he has been frequently likened by our mutual friend Goodge, the great traveller, who was naturally an excessively good-humoured man about town, but who ended by being made F.R.S. for verifying other people's discoveries.

Whether Reginald was anything more worthy of description than the buoy at the Nore our readers must judge for themselves ; it is most absolutely certain that he at one time earned the love and respect of all who knew him. He floated, like the great buoy, passively through calm weather and foul weather, sometimes with the waves rippling pleasantly about him, sometimes with the great northern seas pouring over his head, until the last ship he waited to pilot came safe into port ; and then he broke from his moorings, and was towed comfortably into port himself. So much for Goodge's simile.

In the long course of his life he had many opportunities for making friends and enemies—for making, as we before remarked, successes and failures. He availed himself of these opportunities to the utmost extent of his genius—which we rank high—during all periods of his existence. In the way of failures and blunders, his genius never served him so well through his life as it did on the first instance when he utilised it. The most magnificent blunder which Reginald ever made was being born at all, or, to be

more correct, being brought into the world exactly when he was. In all his future transactions, remarkable as they were, he never approached his first masterly fiasco.

He was humbly conscious of this throughout his life: up to quite a late period in his existence he would coolly and bravely face any member of the family on any other point, but always grew sheepish when it was pointed out to him (as at one time it very often was) that he had inflicted awful wrong upon the family by being born on a Sunday night. It was too frightfully true to be gainsaid, and he, the poor man of the family, suffered for it heavily. The majority of the family, or, rather, of the five families, were rich, and consequently moral; at all events, it was not worth their while to put him out of the way; still he went near expiating his crime, or worse, his blunder, on many occasions. The circumstances surrounding his birth were nearly the same as those in the "Juif errant" of Eugène Sue, and there was nothing to prevent his having been the hero of a similar romance, except that he lived in England, and that the estate was contended for, not by Jesuits, but by the legal advisers of some rich families.

The origin of the five families to whom Reginald was about to become the victim is lost in the mists of obscurity. Their names were Digby (the great merchant), Simpson, Talbot, Murdoch, and Hetherage. They had originally, all of them, it was said, come from the North, but they never cared very much for going into their ancestry, with the exception of the Talbots, who had some very dim and remote connection with Alton Towers, and also with the recently ennobled family of Snizort; which, at the time when our story begins, was represented by MacSnuffles of Sneeze, the Barony of Cackle having been in abeyance since 1748.

At the time of Reginald's birth the head of all the families was acknowledged to be old Digby, the last of his name, as he declared (though by looking about him he might have found a few poor relations). He, however, for reasons of his own, hated all his relations, both poor and rich, and even the richer relations seldom darkened his doors at No. 1, Bolton Row, and when they did, met with but a sorry reception. Other company was very welcome there, but it was not of the sort, brilliant in one way as it might be, which would in any way suit a British merchant's wife. Whereby our readers doubtless gather that old Digby was unmarried.

In the year 1780 few men were better known in the mercantile world than Mr. Digby, M.P., the merchant. Originally, people said at the time, of highly respectable extraction, everything which he had touched had turned to gold, and he was one of the richest

men in England, though he had the reputation of being one of the most disreputable. He had never been married, and so had no heir, the destination of his money being utterly unknown to all relations, who were not very numerous, and, with one exception, rich. Even the exceptional one, however, was a clerk in the House of Commons with a very good income, which of course died with him; and so, when a man's poorest relation has an income of £800 a year, he may be said not to be plagued with those troublesome pests, poor relations, at all—for kinship, with some people, does not imply relationship. Such was the account which the world gave of the great Digby in his old age.

Mr. Digby was very much sought after by his recognised relations, in spite of his invariably bullying them when they came to see him, and in spite also of a great scandal, almost of European dimensions, which ended in the House of Lords, a duel, and the total exclusion of the great capitalist from court, or even from office, for a long time. The loudly-expressed anger of the King and Queen soured him, and he retired from the world of society, though not from that of politics. Middle-aged when the scandal happened, he was in the prime of his debating powers, and his voice, on certain subjects which he had made the study of his life, was law in the House of Commons.

The lady to whom the scandal attached died without his having made her the reparation in his power. That his conduct with regard to her in this respect was considered highly dishonourable, in a not very particular age, he was soon made aware of by the most free-living of his acquaintances. What his reasons were no one knew, but he used to say that no one ever forgave his behaviour but his own relations.

Towards these relations the old man, disappointed and miserable, with all his vast wealth, conceived a detestation bordering, they thought, upon lunacy. One of them only was often admitted to see him—William Hetheridge, the clerk in the House of Commons. He, as he roughly expressed it, got more kicks than halfpence.

Scandals die out to a certain extent after a time, more easily, perhaps, in the case of great capitalists and great orators than in the case of common people. As for the great scandal of all in this case, people began to say that the unhappy cause had mainly brought it on herself, and that old Digby had his reasons for what he did. A man may be a considerable villain in certain societies if he has a million and a half of money; and although certain people had helped to treat Digby as a social Timon, yet they remembered that Timon had not lost his money by any means,

and remembered the times when "Timon's gold trod heavy on their lips"—for the merchant used to entertain well, and was generous with his money. After ten years, Digby might have been pretty much where he liked—in men's society, at all events: he liked, however, to be at his office, his home, and the House of Commons.

His family, though they paid him all the court they were allowed to, spread the most remarkable rumours about him, which no one believed, and which, getting round to his ears again, did them no good at all. The most popular of these rumours among the family was that he had sold himself to the devil. This must have come to the old man's ears, and we shall see what very grim mischief he made among them in return for their kind suggestion. It was the most expensive piece of nonsense ever set afloat by any human family, and, but for the tender care of the lawyers, might have paid off a large part of the national debt.

At last the old man failed rather suddenly: he had a quiet warning, which he and his doctor kept to themselves, but he knew his end was near. The doctor asked him if he had made his will, "For now," he said, "that you are recovered, it is the time to do so." The old man grinned sardonically as he told the doctor that he had made it the day before. He then began laughing in a strange way, and gave the doctor to understand that "they," as he always spoke of his relations, would find themselves considerably puzzled.

He sent for his four principal relations (he had none—recognised—of his own name, as we have said before), Talbot, Simpson, Murdoch, and Hetherage, and when they came he received them with friendly cordiality. He told them that his end was near, and Talbot, Murdoch, and Simpson all concurred in saying that they hoped he had many happy years to live. Hetherage, on the other hand, said not one single word, and looked so exactly as if it was no business of his, and a matter of profound indifference to him, that the sardonic old sinner was delighted; and stepping across the room, he took from a glass cabinet a snuff-box set in diamonds of immense value, and gave it to Hetherage, who thanked him, and put it in his pocket with an unmoved countenance.

He then informed his relations that his will was already made, and that the various branches of the family were handsomely provided for, to the latest generation, which they were extremely glad to hear. While he was speaking the door opened, and a most beautiful boy, about eight years old, dashed into the room, and climbed on the old man's knee, throwing his arms round his neck and kissing him. None of the four had ever seen such a beautiful

boy, so splendidly dressed. Three of them could not conceal their extreme vexation at the boy's appearance, for they saw that the rumour was true which they had heard, but had constantly denied : that there was a son in the family on whose innocent head was visited the merchant's anger against the mother. This boy, they thought, would run away with a large sum of money.

William Hetherage alone spoke.

"Cousin Digby, you owe some reparation here. Of your past affairs I know very little, of the motives for your strange conduct, nothing. But I hope that you have done your duty by this child?"

"Yes, I have," said old Digby. "He returns to his natural position in life; he must make his own way in the world."

"It is a question between yourself and your God, Digby," said Hetherage. "Poor little innocent! My child, if you ever want a friend—and, God knows, I am afraid you will—remember William Hetherage."

The boy laughed and said, "Yes, he would remember, and so would his sister Isabel;" and the four said good-bye, and departed, seeing their kinsman for the last time.

The merchant sent the boy away, and sat a long while musing, as if undecided in purpose. At last he said, "No, I will not give it up. Good heavens! what a rage they will be in!" Here he laughed a laugh rather horrible to hear than otherwise. The grim, heartless old sinner, with the power of his wealth only a matter of a few days, was laughing as he thought of the fiendish mischief which he could make with it after his death.

He ordered his carriage, and, greatly to his valet and house-keeper's dismay, told the coachman to drive to the House of Commons. "There will be a row about the first clause in my will," he said to himself, "and Murdoch and Simpson are quite noodles enough to try and set it aside on the grounds of insanity. I must show in the House, and talk the hardest common sense. Let us see, the Canal Bill is on. That will be just the thing."

Great astonishment was expressed at seeing him come in to take his place; several members offered their arms, and many more their congratulations. He had scarcely sat down when he was on his legs again, and made the speech known as the "Tea-kettle Speech," in what took place subsequently. For a short time some people thought that the end of his speech was a little flighty; but, after a very few years, everybody recognised it to be, what many knew it to be at the time, a speech of consummate power and ability.

After alluding to his illness, and asking for their patience if he spoke slowly, he begged the House to pause before inflicting a

heavy tax on posterity by granting excessive concessions to canals, as was at that time proposed. After giving a vast number of invaluable facts from his own experience, he went on to say that canals were merely the precursors of far more rapid and extensive modes of transport, and that he believed that before very long we should be doing the greater part of our national work by means of boiling water. He never was more calm or logical in his life than when he pointed out the fact of the great power exerted by boiling water on the lid of a tea-kettle. Knowing him to be a man who had made great sums by buying inventions before they were known to the world, the House listened and wondered. He passed to other things, and then sat down, leaving even those who were in doubts about the tea-kettle, forced to say that scarcely any man in the House could have made a more valuably lucid speech, with that exception.

Three days afterwards the shutters were up at his house: Mr. Digby was dead.

CHAPTER II.

THE WILL.

THE will came on the assembled family like a thunderclap. The first impression of every one was that the old man was mad: the opening clause was so astonishing and strange, that, as the old man himself had foreseen, it ultimately caused a few of his more foolish relations to try and set it aside on the score of insanity. The first clause, combined with his speech in the House of Commons, made up a piece of mischief particularly intended to plague the two most litigious of his relations, and which was perfectly successful. Here are the contents of the will, abridged. It somewhat differs from Thellusson's, but made nearly as much trouble.

“I, Thomas Digby, having been a great sinner, having accumulated vast wealth, and having got no good from it, but great evil, do by this, my last will and testament, give and bequeath the whole of my property to my friend the devil, for his sole use and benefit during his lifetime, hoping that he will repent, and make a better use of it than I have done.

“In case, however, of his dying before me, or his not appearing in person to claim the property, I make the following dispositions.”

After the above beginning they were pretty well prepared for anything, but scarcely for what followed.

He appointed Geoffrey Talbot and William Hetherage his executors, leaving them £10,000 a-piece.

“In order to secure my faithful servants, Robert and Anne Dicker, from any possibility of legal troubles, I have already provided for them by deed of gift during my lifetime. In the same manner I have done all which I intend to do for my illegitimate son, who at present bears my name, and for his half-sister. Robert and Anne Dicker are appointed his guardians, and the boy will bear the name which I have given to them in my instructions. If the boy does well, he has my blessing; if he does badly, I love him far too well to give him my curse.”

The whole of his estate was then to be realised and placed in the English funds. No one of his four principal relations, Hetherage, Talbot, Simpson, or Murdoch, *or any of their male descendants living at the time of his death*, were to take any further benefit from his property. After the death of his last living relation in either of the four families named, that was to say, after the death of Alfred Hetherage, son of William Hetherage (who being now twenty-four, might last to sixty-four), possibly in the year 1820, a settlement was to take place. The eldest male descendant of the Hetherages, not alive at his death, was to take one-half of the property then existing; the other half was to be divided equally among the living male descendants of the Simpson, Talbot, and Murdoch who were alive at his death.*

Such was the will. It entirely prevented any one save the executors from touching a penny, and left them exactly as they had been before.

CHAPTER III.

REGINALD COMMITS THE CROWNING VILLANY OF HIS LIFE.

Not very long afterwards, Lord North was speaking to Lord Thurlow, of course about indifferent matters, for they were no longer colleagues. “Have you seen this lunatic merchant’s will?” he asked. “Who would have thought that Digby would have gone mad at last?”

“It is,” said the great lawyer, “one of the cleverest wills I ever saw. The man has done as he always did, exactly what he

* The Thellusson will was far more absurd than this one. The result would have been 170,000,000 of money.

wanted to do. He wanted to annoy his relations, and he has done it ; I could not have succeeded in doing it better for him myself. Nothing could have prevented his locking up his property for a certain number of lives, or leaving it to Bedlam. He has done more—he has left exactly such a will as will tempt his relations into law.”

“ Why did he hate them so ? ” said the other.

“ It runs in some families,” said Lord Thurlow. “ What would become of us lawyers if it did not ? ”

“ Will the law set the will aside ? ” said the other.

“ Kill the goose that lays the golden eggs ? I should fancy not easily,” said the lawyer. “ There will be money enough come into the lawyers’ pockets to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, if the Templars will join us Lincoln’s Inn men. Good-bye.”

The Hethereges, like most poor people, had the habit of marrying early. William Hetherege had married early, and his son Alfred, the youngest male relative of Digby, the last on the black list, had been married nearly the prescribed time which is laid down as that when an addition to the family may be looked for with tolerable certainty. The Hethereges, father and son, were of no great importance to the family, not being rich, and the consequence was that the state of health of Mrs. Alfred was a matter of profound indifference to them. The nurse, however, was in waiting at the very time when Mr. Digby made his extraordinary speech in the House of Commons on the subject of tea-kettles.

Alfred was a junior clerk in the House, under his father, and of course heard his speech. He was at first under the impression that his cousin, the great Digby, had been drinking ; but his speech was so fine, and yet so very absurd, that he determined to make his wife laugh about it. She wanted a good laugh, for she had been low in her mind ever since the nurse had come into the house.

In fact, Nurse Smart was not at all a reassuring person. She was aristocratic and expensive, or the Hethereges, as poor people, would not have had her at any price. She was very religious, warranted very temperate, very lady-like, and was supposed to be the daughter of an archdeacon or magistrate, no one ever knew which ; but she was not reassuring. And the only fault to be found with her, said the doctors, was that she was used by over-precaution to make young mothers too nervous. One of the great doctors of the day said that she was the most ignorant old humbug in London ; but he was always violent.

She had talked persistently about nothing but the coming event to Mrs. Alfred, until that young lady was as close on a nervous

fever as need be. She had got hold of a Prayer-Book, and had read the first sentence of the Churching Service, which was less assuring than the conversation of Nurse Smart. She was very glad to forget the "pain and peril" mentioned there by seeing Alfred come smiling in from the House of Commons.

"My darling," he said, "I have such a joke for you! Cousin Digby came down to the House and made one of the most masterly speeches ever heard, after which he said that he intended to be dragged to Manchester by a tea-kettle. He is as mad as a hatter."

This was too much for Mrs. Alfred. She shut up her Prayer-Book, rose to her feet, stretched out her hand, and said in a loud, shrill voice—

"My child, my child! My unfortunate, neglected, unborn child! My last hope is gone—the hope that would have sustained me through everything is taken from me. I thought that Cousin Digby would have taken to it, and provided for it; now I hear that he is a raving maniac. Let me die."

She fell into his arms as Nurse Smart came rushing in. "Why, what is the matter with the poor lady, sir? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Say it was me," said Alfred, with ungrammatical recklessness. "Yes, say it was me. O yes. Ha, ha! I did it; quite so."

Here Mrs. Alfred, who had sank back on the sofa, grew extremely faint, and murmured, "Let me die."

She was really very ill indeed, and the nurse told Alfred, with a scared face, that she had received a severe nervous shock. It was undoubtedly true. She was a little fragile being, who had been a long time ailing. Any sudden intelligence would have been most dangerous for her. The intelligence which Alfred brought appeared to her, in her overwrought state, to be overwhelming, and she sunk under it. She, in fact, never ultimately recovered the effects of that unlucky joke.

Nurse Smart begged Alfred in heaven's name to fetch the doctor. Alfred fled and roused Saville Row, sending every doctor he found at home away to his house at once, and leaving word for every one to follow post-haste. There were so many carriages at his door that night that the link-men thought he was giving a party, and assembled in some force, until undeceived, when they sulkily departed.

Actually before he got home the child was born. The first doctor was only just in time to usher the child into the world, and be able, with the nurse and two other hastily arrived doctors, to

swear as to the date of its birth. The minute was of very little matter, the hour was very little matter: *the wretched little swindler was born nearly two days before the death of Digby.* And until that child was dead and buried not a human being could touch a penny of Digby's money, with the exceptions previously mentioned.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAMILY FORGETS CERTAIN FACTS ABOUT DIGBY, BUT
REMEMBER HIS MONEY.

THERE was fearful consternation among the assembled relatives when the will was read. Even Geoffrey Talbot and William Hetherage were disappointed. Practically no one was to feel the direct benefit of the old man's money until after they were as dead as he was: a rather ghostly idea. When they first realised the facts, the first effect on some of them were muttered curses. If the old man had risen from his grave then and seen them, he would have been amply revenged, and might have altered his will. But the most able and benevolent of our theologians doubt whether departed spirits are allowed to see the fruition of their actions in the next world, or the spirit of the departed Digby might have laughed a laugh so grim and happy as to be entirely out of place either in the nether or higher regions.

The youngest living man, as we have said, was Alfred, then twenty-four, and of weak health. Before his death nothing could be done—unless they could set aside the will.

That was improbable, but possible. Each man saw that at once; but, then, each man profoundly distrusted his neighbour, and no man was lawyer enough to say what the effect of success would be. It was evident that unless something could be done by united action they could only calculate on their descendants inheriting the money. That was something, for, with the exception of Hetherage, they were all rich, and the possible succession of their heirs male would reflect its splendour on them. They had enough, and might live the more easily and freely as their descendants were provided for. Still the will was a terrible disappointment.

Geoffrey Talbot seemed to be out of the reckoning altogether, for he was a childless widower, getting old.

William Hetherage had a son Alfred, who was married and expecting a child. As matters stood, this young man's child, if a son, would be the first to participate in the will. But none of them knew exactly when the child would be born.

Richard Murdoch had one son, consumptive and dissipated, who might marry.

Robert Simpson had a daughter who had married her cousin, was thirty-two years of age, and had not as yet had any children.

Geoffry Talbot was the first man who spoke. "You see, cousins, that we have made a mess of it. We flattered and harassed the old man so continually, that he lost confidence in all of us except Hetherage. As it stands, it seems to me that Hetherage has every chance of seeing his grandson in possession of half the money—when he and his son are in heaven. I take my £10,000, and retire from the contest. Cousin Dick Murdoch, your son may marry. Let him be quick about it, or he will die of drink: his son will share. Cousin Bob Simpson, your daughter will have no children, and you are only forty-nine. Marry again. To recur to you, Dick Murdoch, I should say the same thing. You are a widower, and if Tom sticks to the brandy bottle, you are as likely to have a son as he is—for, perhaps, no woman would marry him. It is obvious, cousins, that the money must come to our children or our children's children. Why worry ourselves about the matter?"

Mr. Robert Simpson said, "Cousin Talbot, you are laying down the law without any evidence. My daughter may have children yet."

"She may not have a boy, Cousin Simpson," said Geoffry Talbot, who had the family failing of delighting in annoying his relations, though he was one of the most agreeable and placid-tempered man in Europe. "Besides, in the case of a vast inheritance like this, it would cost £20,000 to prove whether the old man, from his wording of the will, meant the money to go through the female branch at all. No; I should marry again. Alfred's expected child may be a girl, in which case I might think it worth my while to marry again, even at my age."

William Hetherage spoke. "You are not aware, then, that Alfred's wife was confined two days before the old man's death. The boy is a very fine boy, and is likely to do well. I did not mention the matter, because I did not know, any more than you, the contents of this will, and I did not think that my affectionate relations particularly cared to know of the circumstance."

"This is a swindle," said Simpson.

“There will be no settlement till about 1860, if the boy lives,” said Murdoch.

Talbot burst out laughing. “Come, Hetherage,” he said, “will you walk? I shall marry now. If I have a son, it will be a race between him and Alfred’s. ‘*Solvuntur risu tabulae*,’ cousins. Let the old man’s money go to the devil, to whom he originally left it.”

Simpson and Murdoch, however, were not quite so cynical as Talbot. They laid their heads together, and resolved on law; and to law they went.

So began the great lawsuit, which, at one time, seemed as though it would last for ever. It began with an effort on the part of Simpson to get it set aside on the grounds of insanity; but this was only the beginning. Other pleas and other interests came in, until in 1830 there were nearly forty suitors in the case, while the man who stopped the way—Reginald—was only fifty. But here we anticipate. Much had come and gone before that, which we shall have to narrate. Geoffry Talbot married, and had two sons; they had eleven sons; the two eldest of these eleven had, the one three sons, the other two. Again, Murdoch married, and had nine grandsons, who assisted in peopling Australia with sons. Mrs. Simpson, who married her cousin, had two sons, who had seven sons, who assisted in the population of the United States and British North America. All these men and boys had some hazy interest in the estate, down to Murdoch’s youngest grandson James, and Simpson’s eldest grandson George.

In startling contrast to this wonderful increase of possible claimants in the other branches of the family, the Hethereges did not increase at all. Alfred died, leaving one son—the *auctor mali*—Reginald, who, after the death of old Talbot, Simpson, and Murdoch, was devoutly wished dead by his numerous relations. Reginald, again, had only one son, Charles, of whom we shall see a great deal more, but who had rather less right (at least, so the family considered at one time) to exist in this world than his father had.

At the beginning of the great lawsuit the family quarrelled pretty heavily; but in the lapse of ages, seeing that there was no likelihood of a settlement without murdering our friend Reginald (who has to go hand in hand with us through the story), they became as fond of one another as relations usually are, and assisted one another to accumulate rather handsome fortunes. They came originally of a hard griping stock, and were all pretty well off when the genius of the family, Digby, died. We shall not see very many of them out of all the host, but it is

necessary to say something about the numerous sons and grandsons.

Talbot had shaken the pagoda tree rather heavily, and so the Talbots had a perfect Pleiades of stars against their name at the India House; and, besides this, they had a tradition that if a certain deed could ever be found, Alton Towers was their own—a tradition which gave them great prestige, and which caused them to treat Lord Shrewsbury publicly as an interloper.

Murdoch's *spécialité* was woolstapling. He was one of the first to see the capabilities of Australia, and so his nine grandsons either ruled small principalities in the new South land, and drove to their offices in London in tilburys.

Simpson was a Manchester man, and his seven grandsons found both Manchester and Charlestown very agreeable places.

William Hetherige had started at a disadvantage with his richer relations. He was, as we have mentioned before, a clerk in the House of Commons, and was a man very highly respected and looked up to—a man of grooves and routine, who had been so long in office that he remembered Speaker Onslow and Sir Robert Walpole. He was in very good society; indeed, in far better than any of the others were, who, with the exception of Talbot, were not by any means refined. His son Alfred came to the desk while his father was still there, and married on his appointment. The result was, as we have seen, the unfortunate baby.

William Hetherige took his £10,000 without dispute, and partly spent it in good living. Such as he did not spend got into the whirl of the lawsuit and disappeared, causing him to die very poor, leaving Alfred nothing but his salary, his young wife's grave, and his motherless child Reginald. The family saw little of Alfred, and less of the child: indeed, the wit of the family averred that the child Reginald was never invited to see any of his little cousins, unless they had scarlet fever, measles, or small-pox. Whatever truth there was in this cruel allegation, one thing is certain—the boy grew up without any serious ailment, and, not content with robbing all his young relations of their inheritance, insisted on being much better looking, more amiable, and more clever than any one of them. Alfred, being a man of moderate means, naturally chose an expensive school for the boy, and he was sent to Eton, with a view of going into the army. He displayed considerable talents at Eton, and in the opinion of all who knew him, he was much too good for a marching regiment. However, he entered one, and managed to be very highly respected and loved by his brother officers, and adored by his men. His

necessary allowances were, of course, of some trouble to his father ; but Reginald was so very careful, that they got on very well, to the great astonishment of the family, who considered them as very little better than mendicants. When they heard that Reginald was about to unite his fortunes and handsome person to those of a young lady of beauty and wealth, they said it was really time something did turn up in that quarter. When it was understood, however, that the young lady had only £900, they washed their hands of the whole beggarly business, and left father and son to go to destruction together.

Reginald's charming manners and great ability made him some powerful friends ; and the young lady he had married, though not rich, was exceedingly well connected. It was thought eminently necessary that he should be provided for, and his friends, not his relations, contrived to ring such continuous peals of bells in his praises into the ears of a minister, that at length, with much bad language, the minister gave Reginald a place which he wanted for some one else : and he left the army for the writing table, with a salary of £500 a year, rising to £800.

He lost his father and wife nearly at the same time, and was left alone with his only child Charles. One affliction brought on another, each of which he bore with a curious gentle endurance, which was one of the most remarkable traits in his character, and which never, during all which followed, deserted him. His father died, and he had scarcely recovered the grief which this event caused to an extremely sensitive and affectionate disposition, when the overwhelming affliction of his wife's death followed ; she being the third Mrs. Hetherage in succession who had died leaving only one son, which the other branches of the family considered a judgment on the Hethereges for the iniquity of existing at all. Reginald had always been a very careful accountant, but in the absence of mind which followed his last grief he let the affairs of his office get into irretrievable confusion. By signing wrong papers without examination, he had permitted a fraudulent clerk to embezzle some £18,000, for which he was made answerable. He was left with a growing boy and a salary of £200 a year until the monstrous debt was paid.

There now came to Reginald a period of continual debts and duns and anxiety, which would have soured for ever a man with a less philosophical mind than his. Executions in his house occurred more than once—always, fortunately, when the boy Charles was away. He made acquaintance with the bailiff's man, and learnt many curious things from him. When he was arrested he used to make friends in the sponging houses. All

these debts, which so cruelly worried the innocent, stricken man, were mere comparative trifles contracted when he was in a good and rising position, perhaps amounting to about one year of his old income. The policy of the family invariably was the same—to let matters come to a crisis as above mentioned, then pay the sum required, taking it in turn, and afterwards have their money's worth out of Reginald in a good scolding; after which they would go to church in pewsful, and confess themselves miserable sinners with extreme satisfaction. Charles used to say that these were the only true words they ever spoke; but we shall see what kind of young gentleman he was immediately.

On more than one occasion, when the deputed member of the family arrived at the scene of the disaster, he found everything paid and most entirely comfortable. Whenever this happened, and the member asked who had paid, it was always the same people—Messrs. Cox and Greenwood, Craig's Court, Charing Cross. That eminent firm seemed to have quite a passion for Reginald, which was as great a mystery to the family as it was to Reginald himself. Neither the family nor he, however, had the least wish to make impertinent inquiries, or to look at one single tooth in the mouth of that gift horse.

Well fitted for society, and liking it, Reginald gave it up entirely, and, much against his will, lapsed into a Bohemian sort of life. He had no cause to complain of his old friends, but he was perforce shabby when not at his office, at which place one well-cut frock coat was made to last him four years. He certainly kept up acquaintance with his more intimate friends, but his visits to them were few and far between.

The boy Charles grew up a fine, handsome lad, with a great deal of promise, and a very sharp tongue. He was in a very different position to his father, as far as the family were concerned. Nothing could possibly take place until that wretched Reginald was out of the way. *Then* the boy would be heir to untold thousands. Lionel Talbot, a young barrister with nothing on earth to do but to mind other people's affairs, made out, by a careful calculation, that Charles would be worth about three millions of money. Aunt Hester Simpson, on the other hand, calculated the sum at five hundred pounds; the plain truth being that, according to one theory, Charles would have come into about ten millions, and to another, that he would have to go into the bankruptcy court the moment he came of age. Charles and the vast majority of the family, however, believed him to be possessed of almost incredible wealth. The family, considering his father a drug in the market, a person only to be tolerated, and hardly

that, took considerable notice of the boy at one time as a possible heir. The father, with some of them, was a certainty and no good whatever. He had gone to the bad. The boy probably would also; but, as church-goers, they read in the Funeral Service that a man brought nothing into this world, and that it was certain that he could take nothing out. Consequently Charles Hetherège could not possibly take a million or so of money away with him. He must leave it behind him: he might as well leave it in their direction as in another. The boy, therefore was a person to be cultivated. Unfortunately the boy knew his own power, and was utterly bumptious, even with Aunt Hester.

He liked her the best of his relations, but he was utterly devoted to his father, and looked on the family as his natural enemies. Aunt Hester was supposed to have testamentary designs towards the boy to the sum of a few hundreds, but she was entirely wrapped up in a certain cousin James Murdoch, who would get the main part of her property.

Miss Hester Simpson, the great novelist, whose name is known from China to Peru, was the nearest relation which the boy Charles had next to his father. She was third cousin once removed. When and how she was removed, we are unable to find out, but she was almost certainly third cousin. She had no interest in the lawsuit at all, but was generally considered head of the family, for what reasons does not exactly appear. She loved her relations as well as the dead merchant Digby, or the boy Charles.

As regards the latter, the mention of any one of their names brought a howl from him. He had to go and stay at their different houses, and his father was always under pecuniary obligations to them. He repaid their hospitality by behaving as bad as he could. He had always a certain sense of reserved power, and the knowledge that the family wished his father out of the way. On one occasion, in early youth, he was extremely naughty in the house of Aunt Hester. Aunt Hester rebuked him, pointing out that boys who took stolen apples to bed with them, not only lost their chance of eternal bliss in the next world, but ruined their insides in this. The boy replied, "Fiddle-de-dee! You are precious careful of *my* inside, because I shall have a heap of money when pa dies. But I wouldn't trust any one of you" (meaning the family) "to make pa's tea." After Aunt Hester told this to the family, some of them deliberated whether poisoning the boy as well as the father would not be a justifiable action, and she sat silent.

Aunt Hester was as capable of doing such a thing as we are. But she wrote a great number of novels (we mean a great many for that time; the exact number is six), and consequently had to put herself, theoretically, into a vast number of situations, into which she could not have got in the ordinary course of affairs, any more than she could have poisoned Charles Hetherege. She used to get herself nearly sent to the bad by a wicked man (a nobleman, of course), and get out of the scrape in the most wonderful manner: in her great novel, "The Triumph of Virtue," she actually marries the villain who has planned her ruin. She wrote such a transcendently virtuous novel, that the world read it with awe, and went to its ordinary places of amusement in sackcloth and ashes. The very loosest people read it, because Aunt Hester, in her tremendous virtue, sailed a little near the wind—as was of course necessary, for how can you make vice hideous without describing it? Aunt Hester saw that her great moral purpose would fall dead unless she let her readers know what she meant, and she did it, so that there was no doubt about her meaning. Her first four great novels, after lying unread for a time, were twenty years ago taken up again and praised very highly. Some people said that they were almost improper, and others said that they were outrageously dull: we consider the people who said so to have been idiotic. Still the four novels became the fashion again, and it was demanded, in some quarters, that all writers of fiction must model themselves on Aunt Hester. Some of them did so, and were highly successful.

Aunt Hester's four novels were a great success; her fifth was not so. While she wrote about young ladies, she was masterly; whenever she attempted men, she made a failure, for the simple reason that she knew nothing of them. In her fifth novel, however, she showed really great genius. She depicted the boy Charles Hetherege as she thought that he would be in his future life. She was very nearly right, and all the twaddle she ever wrote may be forgiven for that one sketch. It is of no use to us, because she wrote of him *in posse*, and we only *in esse*. It was a dead failure, because her mistakes about the details of young men's lives were really too absurd. Still we think it her best novel. It embodied the idea that a boy like Charles Hetherege could come to no good; in fact, that he was what the Americans call "a limb." She expressed that opinion to Charles frequently, while writing her novel, and the rest of the family were quite of her opinion.

Charles was rather glad of this. He liked his father's company best of all, though his father talked very little to him.

“You can't have any money till I die,” the father said once.

“Let us do without, then,” said the boy.

On another occasion the boy said, “I say, pa, what do you think of Aunt Hester's novels?”

“They analyse female souls which are not in any way worth it,” said the father.

It is evident to all rightminded persons that the more the boy was away from this awful heretic of a father, who denounced Aunt Hester's novels as “bread and butter spiced with impropriety,” the better for him. The family took action. “Limb” as the boy might be, it was evident that the boy would have a large sum of money some day, and that he would be a valuable *parti* for some pretty young cousins—for the family had gone in not only for wealth, but for beauty, and, breeding from selected stocks, had attained a very high average of the latter quality. The boy might have married any one of his cousins. Had the family been Mahomedan instead of Christian, he might have had a harem. As it was, the boy was a disreputable young scapegrace—a limb of Satan—a brand to be snatched from the burning, in spite of its violent, and partly successful efforts to get burnt. The family continued to burn their fingers more or less severely about this brand for a number of years. At last, in comparing excoriations of fingers in a grand family conclave or palaver, it was unanimously thought that the brand must go to a hot place, with its father Reginald, and that the only thing to be tried was cold water. We anticipate much here, however, because that resolution was only come to when Reginald was seen to be good for eighty.

CHAPTER V.

REGINALD BEGINS TO SOW THE WIND.

REGINALD gave his son Charles a very good education. The obstructive Reginald had read a great deal, and he gave the benefit of his reading to his boy. The family had no difficulty at all in placing the boy at Eton; it was as easy to them as apprenticing him to a blacksmith.

Reginald thought that it was for the best, the more so that by the boy's being at Eton, he could go furtively down by the coach

and see him. The expenses of a King's scholar were not large, and the father worked extra hard at journalism, so as to take a few guineas to the boy, and possibly distribute a few to his friends. Charles remembered himself at Eton as a well-dressed and rich boy, well *répandu* with every one except the masters. The Sunday afternoons on the terrace at Windsor with his father and his companions were golden Sundays for him. His father was, in the eyes of the family, a man beggared by his own carelessness: he had signed away, at one stroke, £18,000 of the public money, and the nation had treated him very kindly in allowing the chance of signing away £18,000 more, with a salary of £200 a year. But the boys cared nothing for this. To them Hetheridge's father was the most agreeable and popular man they had ever met: a very easy-going gentleman in a blue coat and brass buttons—a lazy gentleman. But on one occasion the lazy gentleman, who was sitting and watching the bathers, was seen to hurl himself (blue coat, brass buttons, and all) in a parabolic curve into the water, over the heads of the assembled swimmers. A boy in the middle of the river had got the cramp; another boy had tried to help him in the struggle, but could not cry out for the water in his mouth. Reginald Hetheridge was the first to see the disaster, and had got to the drowning boys before any one. A hundred and fifty bare young arms bore him to the bank with his prize. After this the boys would have done anything for him. He was an old Etonian himself, and if universal suffrage was anything but a sham, he would have been head-master. He was taken to the tutor to be dried, and the tutor pointed out to him the awful responsibility which he incurred in forming the mind of a great capitalist such as his son, a boy who would certainly, if he gave up his eccentricities, be in the House of Lords. Reginald, who was in a shirt and a pair of trousers belonging to the tutor, looked at his drying clothes dolefully, and wondered if the tutor would want the five-and-twenty pounds which he had to pay that afternoon. He thought he had better not say anything about it, but quietly pay it. If he asked for time it would look mean, for the money was for luxuries which the boy had ordered for himself; and, besides, the non-payment might hurt the boy. So he put on his own trousers sorrowfully, and, with the independence of a Briton not in debt, asked the tutor whether he would explain to him what his son Charles's eccentricities were.

“He,” said Reginald, buttoning his coat, “has been two years at Eton, and this is the first complaint I have heard of him.”

The tutor called to his assistance a master, and then Reginald

heard such a tale about his son's eccentricities as surprised even him, Bohemian as he was. It was obvious that the "family" were right, and that he had for a son, either by incubus or succubus, a very remarkable young gentleman indeed.

This perfectly graceless man went to London on the box seat of the coach next morning, and when he was deposited in London, the coachman deposed that the box-seat was mad, for that he had done nothing but giggle all the way from Windsor, and had given him a sovereign. Reginald had chosen to laugh at his son's eccentricities instead of rebuking them; though to his credit it must be said he never heard a hundredth part of them, or he would never have laughed.

Charles's eccentricities were grave enough. Eton was pretty free and easy in those days, and, by the noble old way of giving boys liberty, of letting each boy find his place, was turning out *men*, not dummies. It is objected to some of our public schools that they throw boys into *temptation*. We ask which of them throws a boy into half as much temptation as a boy of the labouring class has to endure? We ask the oldest college tutor this question—What class of boys are the *most trouble to him*, the public school boys, who have seen life and know to some extent the value of money, or the poor unhappy babies who come straight from their mothers' apron strings? We think that college tutors will say that the public school men give them the least trouble.

Free, easy, and liberal as Eton was and is, she might seem to some people a little behind the march of intellect in the case of Charles Hetherige. Either that audacious young fellow was before his time, or Eton was behind hers. We express no opinion whatever; in these days of liberty, no one likes to express an opinion. If we dared to express an opinion, however, we should be inclined to say that Eton on the whole was right, and that Charles Hetherige was wrong. He kept both tutor and father in ignorance of things like these: they would have thought that a boy of fifteen is not the person to decide about the mortality of the soul. Charles Hetherige did that at fifteen years old, and was very emphatic on the matter.

Later on, he was in holy orders, preaching beautifully at Arcis-sur-Mer, after having gained a great reputation as a preacher. That is perfectly correct. Charles Hetherige tried to prove logically the mortality of the soul, and the utter extinction of the spiritual part of us after death. But that was at Eton. It would have been a good thing if that had been his only eccentricity in that great school of learning.

The fact was that Charles was "fast." So fast, in fact, that a poor, wretched old lumbering machine like Eton, felt it very difficult to keep up with him. Eton has seen her great radicals. She has nourished to her bosom such astounding democratic poets as Shelley, but she will not stand everything. When a youth at Eton takes to cursing things in general in good iambs, Eton hopes that the time may come when that youth, if of promise, may take to *ble-sing* things in general. But when a youth takes to cursing things in particular, Eton will not stand it without consideration. If a youth sings the praises of wine in Latin hexameters, that youth will be rewarded and extolled. But if that youth carries out his theory of the pleasures of wine by drinking with the soldiers in Windsor, Eton will have none of it. Another pleasure to which youth is addicted, that of fighting, may be celebrated in theoretical Latin, but not in practice. (Here we are trenching on very low grounds.) Once more, a Latin epigram is a fine thing against a Roman Emperor, but when directed against a blameless head-master is not to be tolerated.

Here we feel inclined to draw a veil. Aunt Hester always used to tell us that she was going to draw the veil, whenever she came across anything at all inconvenient to be mentioned. She always told you that she was going to draw the veil very solemnly. Then she did it with two rows of asterisks at the end of a chapter. Then she started another chapter, and told you every mortal thing that she had said that nothing on earth would induce her to reveal, and a great deal more. It was this feminine habit of not being able to hold her tongue that gives that air of frank reality to her stories, which Reginald called more than once in print extreme impropriety. We will copy her method of art as little as possible at this point.

CHAPTER VI.

AND BEGINS TO REAP THE WHIRLWIND.

CHARLES HETHEREGE just saved going to the bad publicly. His genius covered a multitude of sins: with all his faults, faults of which Eton knew little, Eton as a whole was proud of him. The books which had been put into his hands were almost exclusively pagan, and he not only imitated their style in a

marvellous manner, about which Eton knew, but unfortunately assimilated their contents in a manner which Eton could *never* know.

His splendid scholarship saved him from expulsion, and he went in due course of time to King's, where he was received with more curiosity than welcome. Six months after he had been at Cambridge his servant, coming into his room, found that he had not been in bed all night. No one had seen him go out: he had been cheerful, nay, more than cheerful in Hall, but he was gone. A tremendous sensation was made about his disappearance, and the Cam was dragged. A week after a letter came to the Provost from his father, stating that his son was with him; that, finding himself sickening for a dangerous fever, he had fled in the beginning of his delirium to his natural protector, his father. That was perfectly satisfactory to the college authorities.

What passed in the week before his father wrote? Where was he during those six days before his father wrote to the Provost?

Money was not very abundant with Reginald Hetherege, yet Avery, the Cookham boatman, mysteriously started a beershop, which afterwards grew into a public-house, with a spirit license. He called his beershop "The Reginald," and persistently held his tongue to the day of his death whilst tolerably sober. We will not give the long details made by Avery to Reginald Hetherege, which were ended by Avery saying that Charles was as innocent about the matter as a babe unborn. Mr. Avery's notions of "innocence" are of one kind, yours and ours are different. It is perfectly certain that Charles did not believe in his own innocence, though he was in the world's way innocent. Queer fellow as Charles was, he was incapable of villainy to a woman. Had he been less romantic on that point, matters might have gone differently with him; and here we must quit this part of the subject.

There has been a Roman Catholic settlement and an old Roman Catholic family not one hundred miles from Cookham ever since—when? Let us say since the times of Augustine himself. The family fought against the Spanish Armada, refused to have anything to do with the Gunpowder Plot, and refused to touch the later Stuarts with the tongs. Yet Roman Catholic they remained, ruling a large tenantry of Protestants with a gentle, kindly rule, and making about one convert in a century, and that rather against their wills, and after due examination. This family always had a priest as their spiritual director, who was always a finished gentleman, and who was very often consulted by

Protestants in matters which related more to this wicked world than to those of the next.

Monseigneur Morton, the family priest of these times, had two objects in view: the one to keep the family in the faith, and the other to demolish and destroy Mosheim. The first of his objects was a very easy one. A—— was as likely to turn Protestant, as the Sultan is to turn Jew. To begin with, it would be bad *ton*; and, moreover, it would carry with it an incalculable loss of prestige in the best society in France and Italy. Conversion in that family was never thought of; the idea was impossible; so, as far as regarded his spiritual cure, Monseigneur Morton thought that he earned his position rather easily. The heretic Mosheim, however, gave him more trouble than he had calculated on, and he worked like a horse to demolish him, not staying to supper after complines, giving the housekeeper great anxiety.

“Woman,” he said to her once, when she brought him up some cold chicken and a glass of wine, “Avaunt! I am fighting the devil, and, like St. Anthony, I will do it fasting.”

It was the feast of the patron saint of the house he loved so well. The family were away—the main of them in Italy and France. The three boys of the family, sons of the good old man’s heart, were at their different employments in the world—one in the army, one in the navy, and one, his own Benjamin, with the Austrian mission on the Upper Nile—and so the old man determined to have a dissipation, and the housekeeper assisted him in his nefarious object. He had grilled chicken, with weak claret and water, in his own room, and then he got out Mosheim and his manuscript.

Under the influence of the weak claret and water, Mosheim appeared to him a low contemptible dog. Mosheim had made the same *petitio principii* as himself, therefore Mosheim had no right to carry it out half-way. Then he took some more weak claret and water, and saw the end of all Protestantism. He was so elated that he looked round, and then locked the door of his room.

He went to a closet guiltily, unlocked it carefully, and took out something stealthily. It was a box. He listened carefully at the door, and then he opened the box.

He shut it again. “The servants may not be gone to bed,” he said; “I might be discovered.” The silence of night was over the house, however, and his was the only light burning. He opened the box again, and took out——

A cigar. He lit it, and, as he sank back in his chair, smoking it, the beautiful old face seemed to ripple into quiescence; and

our opinion is that if Mosheim and his patron, Frederick the Great, could have entered the room at that moment, they would have had a hearty welcome.

A-ha! Captain Morton, of Napoleon's Cuirassiers, you are not the first man whom the women have driven into the Church. Let us see, Monseigneur Morton, it was before you went to Moscow that she gave you the last kiss. When you met her after Leipzig she had just been married. A-ha! Captain and Monseigneur Morton, she seduced you from your allegiance to England, and then threw you over like an old shoe. The women will do it.

Monseigneur, they will never fight fair. They stab you to the heart and leave you to groan. Cruel? Yes; but who would miss their cruelty?

"Yet," said Monseigneur, "she drove me into the bosom of the Church, and I have found peace. Yes, yes! yes, yes! She has boys now. I should like to get hold of one of them and train him for the—Church—— Well, her boys ought to make good soldiers, if they have their mother's eyes.

"He is an infidel, and so I suppose that her boys will go to mischief. I should like to save one of them, for I was very fond of her. I shall have another cigar, I think; tobacco seems to bring back old memories. Raleigh was not a real heretic, you know; that old catamaran, Queen Bess, believed in the real presence; besides, it stands to reason that no heretic *could* have invented tobacco. Ho! I am getting sleepy, and the ghost of Mosheim may rest in his grave for to-night. The barometer is very low. Ha! I thought so; there is hail."

It was not hail, however, but gravel thrown against the window. He opened it at once, and asked, "Who is there?"

"A soul in desperate distress," said a young voice.

"Go to the door at the left," said the old priest, promptly, "and I will let you in. Are you alone?"

"Yes; she is gone where I shall never go," was the answer.

"Come in quickly. It might be one of *her* boys," he added.

He went down to the postern door with a shaded candle. He admitted some one. When he came up to his own room he looked to see who it was. A tall, handsome young man, with a budding beard and a deadly pale face, evidently in the first phase of some desperate illness.

The priest laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, "What are you?"

"An infidel, a villain, and a murderer. Can you give me peace?"

“No. Do you mean that you are an actual murderer, or only one by construction?”

“By construction.”

“A woman, I suppose,” said the priest.

“Yes.”

“That is bad, very bad. What do you want me to do? Can the law convict you?”

“No; I wish to God it could.”

“Once more,” said the priest, “what am I to do?”

“You Romanists have monasteries, places of seclusion, where a man may repent of his sins, and lead a new life. I want to go into one of them. I have heard of you, and I want your assistance. I will believe anything, and accept anything, if you will give me peace.”

“I know nothing,” said Monseigneur Morton. “You have a conscience, which is something. Have you any relations?”

“Yes; my father is Reginald Hetherege, of the Home Office.”

“And your name?”

“Charles.”

“It is a pity that you half ruined some at Eton with your opinions before you left,” said the Roman Catholic. “But you have come to me for advice. We must go to your father—you are not in a fit state to judge for yourself. Drink that glass of claret, and keep awake.”

The Roman Catholic grooms and their horses were not long in getting ready on the summons of the director. On this occasion the doctor and the master of the house were away, and so the spiritual head had the grooms out of bed in five minutes, and the carriage ready in twenty. The master of the house might have whistled to get the same arrangement accomplished in an hour. We heretics, who have had the thunders of the Vatican hurled at our heads so long, and without any visible effect, may wonder at this; but it is undoubtedly the fact that, although the anger of the Vatican may pass over the head of a king without hurting it, yet that at second hand, in the hands of a priest, is very powerful. A sensible priest acting on Irish servants is either the master of the house or a weak man.

It was in the cold, dull daybreak of a rainy morning, when Reginald was awakened from his sleep by a double knock. His servants paid not the smallest attention to it, and by long experience he knew that he must answer the door himself. He did so. He was at once pushed aside by a Popish priest and an Irish groom, who carried a young man between them into the

dining-room, and laid him on the sofa. Reginald recognised his own son, and in his confusion said, "Is he dead?"

"No," said the priest "not yet; he is very ill. Thank God, he gave me your direction correctly. See, he is going to speak again. Demis, away with you in a hurry. Take the carriage to the nearest news, and run to that direction and fetch the doctor out of his bed."

The priest and Reginald were alone with the sick man. Charles was fearfully ill, and was beginning to mutter.

"Send your servants out of the way, he is going to talk," said Monseigneur Morton.

Reginald locked a door at the end of the passage, and then said, "What is the matter?"

"I can't say; something terrible, I fear. He came to me last night, apparently believing himself to have committed some awful crime. He wanted to join the Holy Church, and become a monk. I, as an old soldier, saw that it was a case more for the doctor than the priest, and so I brought him to you."

"Yes. I thank you a thousand times," said Reginald. "Has there been any *esclandre*?"

"I fancy not, from what he told me on the road, before he got utterly delirious; I should say not. What he says to me persistently is that he was not the principal in some great crime. Hush! he is going to speak again. You have locked the outside door."

The sick man rose up in one of those paroxysms of brain fever which are more horrible than insensibility—even than death. He knew his father, and spoke to him with a dreadful, hoarse voice—

"Father, father! come to me, my own father!"

Reginald had his arm round his neck in a moment. He kissed his son, and the breath from the unhappy boy's lungs came on his face like a hot flame.

"Father, it was the wretch himself; she told me so."

"What wretch, my darling?"

"James Murdoch. Hell gapes for him."

"Has he been with you, my boy?"

"Always, when you were not. Has he any reason to drag me to the devil?"

"Yes, he may have his objects to serve; but he is our relation, and Aunt Hester's favourite. Confide in me, my boy; I would die to help you."

"Is it true what James insists on—that death is extinction?"

"No; you know it is false. Where did you get such notions? Put your trust in God."

“Ay, ay; so cold, so calm. She hardly seemed dead. I thought that she smiled when I kissed her forehead. They had done up her hair as she used to wear it. They had dried it, too—that was kind of them. Be good to Mrs. Avery for doing that, father; the child looked so pretty in death.

“Hark!” he cried, in a terrible voice, “that is the last trump. We are all ready here. Arraign James Murdoch first, oh, Lord of Heaven! Dog! come from your hiding-place, or I will take you single-handed before the judgment seat. To kill my father—my poor innocent father! Gentlemen, I have done my best, and I thank you for your compliments. My father will be glad to hear of my double first. How they knock at her coffin lid, but she sleeps sound.”

Dr. Benson, whose loud knock had produced the last outbreak, was of opinion that Charles was suffering from brain fever brought on by overwork. He had a son at Trinity, who had told him this. Charles, with an excitable brain, had taken up with the most singular opinions at Eton. He had read English and French authors until the last few months, to the neglect of real study, and had utterly overworked himself to keep a high place in classics. Dr. Benson felt it his duty to say to the young man’s father that he had a character for dissipation—not, however, in the way of drink. There was nothing to prevent the young man saving both his life and his reason, if he were kept from bad companions.

“When I speak of bad companions, sir,” said Dr. Benson, “you know to whom I allude. How could you possibly allow such an intimacy to spring up? Your feelings as a father, sir, might have prevented you from handing over your only child to the machinations of a young man like James Murdoch, whose character at Cambridge is pretty notorious, according to my son.”

The unfortunate Reginald was so used to getting into trouble on every possible or impossible occasion, that he was not in the least degree surprised by this outbreak of the doctor’s. He had not the very wildest idea what the doctor was talking about. He supposed he was in the wrong, he always was. He had long come to the conclusion that to be in the wrong might be predicated of him as an inseparable accident, almost a quality. So he only asked the doctor about his son’s medicine, and bowed him out. After that, he and the priest carried the now quiet Charles upstairs, and put him to bed.

“He is right enough now,” said the priest, when they came downstairs; “let us have some breakfast.”

“I do not expect we shall get any,” said Reginald: “at least,

not before the usual time. You see that I have no power of command—I never had ; and if I tell my servants to do anything, they at once leave the house with a portion of my plate. I never prosecute, they know *that*. My family object to me that I do not prosecute ; but then if I did they would equally object to my doing so. I am mainly dependent on my family, and my family naturally object to me. Still, being always in a state of siege by my servants, I keep my garrison furtively victualled. If you can breakfast off pork-pie and claret, I can unlock that cupboard and give it you. I never have any words with my servants, because I let them have their own way. On two occasions they have set the house on fire by reading the novels of my cousin Hester in bed ; but, although I have put the fire out, I have never complained. On one occasion, when I saved a young woman's life, she violently assaulted me, and said what was not true. Since then I have doubled my insurance, and they may all burn together. As a matter of detail, Hester Simpson is not my aunt at all ; we only call her so for testamentary purposes ; she is, as I believe, my third cousin. I only retain the key of this cupboard as the last remnant of my independence as a man and a Briton. Will you breakfast on such fare as I can give you ? You will have this sauce with it—the gratitude of a broken heart, which still beats on, for your conduct to my boy."

"I want to talk to you," was the priest's sudden answer, with a keen look. "I want to talk to you very much. I know more about you than you think. You wrote that article in the —— about the action of the Bishop of Macon." *

"Yes."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I always am," said Reginald.

"That is a sign of repentance," said Monseigneur. "I hardly know how to go on with the dialogue. At your death your son has a large fortune ?"

"Yes."

"And others ?"

"Others ? I tried to make it out once, and stopped short at sixty of them, or forty, or some number."

"Is James Murdoch one ?"

"Yes. James Murdoch will come in for a considerable sum ; that is to say, in the bounds of possibility. If he is hung, his share of the money goes to the others."

"You know his character ?"

* Of course we mean the Bishop of A——n, but there are personalities enough flying about in the world without our adding to them.

“I don't know much about him. He was in the Turkisa army, but he made a mess of his affairs, and they would not stand him. He returned to England, with a view of taking holy orders. He will have Hester Simpson's money. He is needy, because he came to me to borrow ten pounds, as a relation. I had eight-and-sixpence in the house, and I gave him five shillings, which he afterwards paid.”

“That looks very black; I never knew him do that before,” said Monseigneur. “It so happens that I know the man, and so does Benson, who attends most of our Roman Catholic families. When he mentioned his name I knew it. If he has an interest in your death, be careful.”

“But I don't want to live,” said Reginald.

“Then your interests are identical,” said Monseigneur. “I hardly know what to say. I can tell you this: that fellow whom you allowed your son to associate with—is—no better than he ought to be. You heard what your son said, and he will tell you more, I dare say. The young man is a renegade from nothing to Catholicism, from Catholicism to Mahomedanism. From that faith he returned to the bosom of the Church, from which he has been excommunicated. I wish to say little about him. We have young fools in our faith as you have in yours, and the man knows more than——. Well, I would not trust my life in his hands. He is a spy, to begin with, and he lives on that.”

“A Jesuit spy?” asked Reginald.

“You foolish man! Do you suppose that the Jesuits trust their work to such foul hands as his? You little know them.”

“What the boy said just now was only babble,” said Reginald.

“Was it?” said Monseigneur.

“Then I had better live on eggs, so as to avoid poison,” said Reginald.

“Nonsense! only take care of that man.”

“But there are forty others, as I make out,” said Reginald. “Let us talk no more nonsense. Hark! the boy is talking again. Come to me in the afternoon.”

“I will,” said Monseigneur, and walked away saying to himself, “I will do nothing unfair, but if that boy lives he is almost certain to come to us. The terror of the crime which has evidently been proposed to him, and the reaction from his infidelity, will certainly bring him.”

There were, however, accidents in the way, and Charles lived to be an ornament of the Established Church of Great Britain and Ireland.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRUGGLE.

CHARLES'S illness was a long one, but Dr. Benson and his fine constitution pulled him through. By degrees, after being utterly delirious for a long time, he began to recover consciousness. During his extreme delirium he had always shown the greatest horror at the sight of his father—so great that the poor gentleman was forbidden the room. The first sign of his mending was his asking for his father. He asked this of a tall gentleman in black, who was sitting beside him, and with whom he had been feebly trying to join in prayer.

There was a little stir in the room, and his father was beside him.

"Father," he said, "I had an evil dream, but I am thoroughly awakened from it. Is James Murdoch dead?"

"No, my boy."

"Ah! I suppose it was all a dream, was it not?"

"Oh, all a dream," said Reginald. "Was it not, Mr. Morley?"

But Mr. Morley was gone, and had left father and son alone together.

"I am very weak, father; shall I die?"

"No, boy, no."

"I am glad of that. I was not fit for it. I wish, father, that you would send for Monseigneur Morton."

That was promised, and Reginald went away to talk to the Rev. Mr. Morley.

"He is better," said Reginald.

"I know it," said the rector. "I am glad you sent for me. The boy has been trying to pray with me."

"Thank God!" said Reginald.

"I am glad to hear you say *that* much, Mr. Hetherege."

"I am going to be scolded, I know," said Reginald; "but I am so used to it, that I really have ceased to care much about it. But might I ask what you mean, for you mean more than you say?"

"I do," said the rector. "It is notorious that you winked at the boy's dissipation, and encouraged him in his infidelity."

"Who told you that?"

"Several members of your own family, sir."

"My family. Oh, I see. Yes, I quite understand."

“Is it true, Mr. Hetherage?”

“Well, if it is,” said Reginald, “it is the first word of truth they have ever spoken of me or the boy. All which the school-masters practically told me about him was that he was a strange boy, and held strange opinions. I have been with them since; they knew no more, and they could tell me no more. I never rebuked the boy, for I knew nothing either; and if I had rebuked him, he might have quarrelled with me, and then I should have quarrelled with the only friend, except my father Alfred, which I ever had in this wicked world; so help me God!”

Reginald did not bluster or talk loud when he said this, but he said it so quietly and so mournfully, that the rector was deeply touched, and said, like a man, “Can you make a friend of me, Mr. Hetherage?”

“I’ll try,” said Reginald, without a spark of emotion, “if God takes my boy from me. Do you think He will?”

“No, no! I do not think He will. Come, Mr. Hetherage, tell me everything; you must have some confidence in me, or you would not have sent to me when your boy was dying.”

“I have. I have fought your battle pretty hard for you when every shilling was of value to me. I have suffered for you, and so I sent for you to suffer with me.”

“That was natural; but where have you fought my battle, my dear sir?”

“In the *Apollo*—who else?”

“Good heavens! Was it you who took my part?”

“Yes; I saw that you were as foully misrepresented as I was, and I stuck to you. The last famous article I delayed until nearly one o’clock in the day, and the editor was gone. I knew that they could not go to press without it, and I knew that it would lead to my dismissal. I was dismissed; the *Apollo*, instead of disclaiming it, tried to back out of it. I lost £100 a-year, and the *Apollo* was ruined.”

“I owe you more than I can repay, sir; that was the turning-point of our success. More of this another time. Tell me, your boy has been very dissipated.”

“I have not known of it. I have hushed up a great scandal, in which I believe my boy to be innocent. If he had ever been ruined it would have been from the harm he did not do, more than from the harm he has done. Come, sir, here is the truth: I got it all at Eton—from the men by the water-side.”

And then followed the truth, and it was very bad. But the rector said—

“He has been punished in a fearful manner. Will no justice overtake this scoundrel?”

“The justice of God, I suppose,” said Reginald.

“But it is the most infernal villainy I ever heard of, to entrap your son into a promise of marriage. Still, there is always reason to believe your son innocent, as far as the world’s ideas of innocence go; in fact, the result *proves* his innocence.”

“So I always thought since I knew the truth,” said Reginald.

“Well, now we will all hope for the best,” said the rector. “He has had a frightful warning; if he neglects it, he is hopeless.”

“I wish to tell you, rector, that he has asked to see Monseigneur Morton.”

“That is good,” said the rector.

“Is there not danger that, in his present state of mind, he may become a Romanist?”

“H’m! Well, he might do worse,” said the rector, “but I think that I will take care of *that*, if no one else gets at him. Mind, if Morton brings — or — with him, I won’t answer; but I think that I am safe with a pragmatistical old gentleman like Morton.”

“He is a man of seductive and persuasive manners,” said Reginald.

“Quite so,” said the rector. “And also an extremely vain man, who thinks himself quite a match for any three of his more highly-instructed co-religionists; an old English Catholic, who considers himself slighted by Rome, and will take this case in hand himself jealously as his own, and already sees the Digby money—if there is such a thing—safe in the Church’s coffers, he the divine agent. I think I know the length of *his* foot. A Jesuit would, if he got hold of the boy now, begin by frightening into fits, and then take dominion of him body and soul. Morton will do nothing of the kind. He will only offer him religious peace, without any freedom at all; I shall offer him religious peace, with freedom of debate and discussion. Morton will cut him off from one-half of the literature which he loves; I will read Machiavelli with him if he likes. The Church of Rome, sir, is founded on such a rotten basis that she is afraid of the truth; the Church of England, sir, is so firmly founded, that she takes science to her bosom as her twin sister, and says——”

What the Church of England was supposed to say to science, according to the rector, we do not know, because Reginald interrupted him, and said—

“I wanted to tell you how he came to go to this Monseigneur Morton.”

“A-ha!” said the rector, very attentive at once. “Yes; tell me that. I was puzzled, and I meant to have asked you.”

“Why, one of his great friends at Eton was Lord Rotherfield, who has since turned Romanist; and he, in his arguments with my boy, used often to talk about this Monseigneur, his holy, quiet life, and that sort of thing.”

“No mystery *there*, then,” said the rector, disappointed.

Charles, during his convalescence, was very penitent and humbled, and received both his clerical friends with quiet gratefulness, without the least idea that his two mentors were playing for him, and that his father was looking on, an intensely interested spectator, wondering whether Cuddesdon would win, or Stonyhurst. (This is a slight historical anticipation, because one at least of those seminaries was not in existence, but it expresses our meaning.) His son never talked to him about religious matters at all—it was the only closed book between them; he merely knew the result.

“Father,” said Charles, suddenly, one morning when they were walking slowly under the elms in Kensington Gardens, “have you got any money?”

Reginald’s trembling hand went on his son’s arm. “How much?” he said.

“I mean this—have you enough to send me back to Cambridge with?”

“Thank God!” cried Reginald, and struggled to a seat. Even when he was there, a tall Life-guardsmen came suddenly and put his arms round him. “Your father is ill, sir,” he said; “hold him while I get him some water.”

“No, my good man, thank you,” said Reginald; “I am only overpowered with joy.”

“Curious, ain’t it?” said the Life-guardsmen. “The day I got my first stripe I was just the same. Why, you are all abroad, sir, now. What is this guinea for?”

“For you,” said Reginald; “and now go away, like a good young man.”

The corporal looked at the guinea, looked at Reginald, looked at Charles, and tried to look at himself. It was all unreal; nothing was real but the guinea. That even might turn to be a withered leaf, like a witch’s money, the next time he looked at it; so, having saluted, he marched off quickly to the nearest tavern, to change it into silver and beer.

“Father,” said Charles, “why are you so agitated?”

“I am agitated at your decision, my son. I feared that you might go to Rome, and that the priests would come between you and me, and take you from me—or, at least, take your heart from

me. But now you have decided, and we are both free. Oh, God be blessed that this load is off my mind ! ”

“Father,” said Charles, “I see that I have been very inconsiderate. I ought to have told you before, that I never really wavered. But——”

“You did not like to speak to me on the subject. It was quite natural ; we have never spoken on religious subjects, more shame to me. You have cast in your lot with the Church which allows freedom. Say not another word. About money to go back to Cambridge—yes, I have plenty of money to keep you there in decency. You need want for nothing to live like a gentleman.”

“Where on earth did you get the money, father ? ” said Charles. “Have you got any great appointment on a newspaper ? ”

“No—on my honour.”

“Has the family ?——”

“Has your delirium returned, that you ask the question, Charles ? ”

“Is it Mr. Morley ? ”

“Mr. Morley has enough to do to keep himself, as you know : every atom of his income goes in his parish.”

“Then who is it ? ”

“The moment I tell you that, the money stops,” was Reginald’s reply, given so full in Charles’s eyes that he asked no further questions, but kissed his father, and promised that he would be a good boy. So they walked happily home to tea.

Charles could not sleep for thinking about this money, and how his father got it. His father was an attractive man, and might be going to marry a widow. He had half a dozen theories, none of which would fit. Perhaps we had better tell our readers more than Charles ever knew.

Charles had not been ill three weeks when Reginald received the following letter :—

“Craig’s Court, June 20th, 1828.

“Messrs. Cox and Greenwood are requested by their client, General Anders, to make the following communication to Mr. Reginald Hetherige :—

“In case of his son Charles making the determination, of his own free will, to return to Cambridge, and to behave himself there with tolerable decency and propriety, all his necessary expenses will be paid by General Anders, under these conditions—

“First. That his father never mentions this fact to him until he has made his own decision. For the carrying out of this

stipulation, General Anders entirely trusts to the honour of Mr. Reginald Hetheroge.

“Secondly. That the General’s name is never mentioned to any human creature, including Mr. Charles Hetheroge. The General has his private reasons for making this stipulation. He has no desire to get the name of being free with his money—he has been cheated and robbed in his life quite enough already. The money will be immediately stopped if Mr. Reginald Hetheroge violates his word in this respect.

“The General would be glad to know if Mr. Reginald Hetheroge requires any assistance from the General, who wishes to say that he thinks, although Mr. Hetheroge has been very indiscreet, he has not been dishonest.

“If Mr. Hetheroge is at all surprised at this assistance coming from a man whom he never saw or heard of in his life, he begs to inform Mr. Hetheroge that it is part of a very old debt.

“Any inquiries as to General Anders’s antecedents will be singularly offensive, as, indeed, will be any allusion to this matter, direct or indirect, in any way whatever.”

Reginald scratched his head, and wrote a suitable reply. For himself, he wanted nothing, but accepted the General’s assistance to his son with profound gratitude, and promised to comply with all stipulations. “Of course,” he added, “as the General puts it in this way, I will not allude to the transactions between us, and will scrupulously attend to his wishes.” He took this letter, open, to Craig’s Court himself, and saw the head of the firm, who said that nothing could be more proper, and who made arrangements for his drawing the money.

“Then you ask nothing, Mr. Hetheroge?”

“Nothing.”

“I have the pleasure to hand you a cheque for £200, however,” said the head partner. “Will you give me a receipt, please? This is a present from the General to yourself, personally.”

Reginald cashed the cheque, putting the notes in his breeches pocket. He then walked away, wondering more than ever at the mystery of Cox and Greenwood.

The fact of the matter was that General Anders and he were intimate acquaintances, and that he owed General Anders five shillings, for which he was certain to be asked the next time he met him. The General and he had got up a small paper on military matters, and the General had found the money. The paper did not pay, and the General and he had words over the matter, each saying that it was the other’s fault. The General was

notoriously poor, and a fearful screw with what money he had got; so Reginald could not understand it. He went, however, to General Anders's house, determining to pay the five shillings.

"He is one of the best men in the army," said Reginald to himself, "and a really good and noble person. It was only last week that he told me that he had taken his children's bread and cast it to the dogs, over the *Red, White, and Blue Gazette*. Well, he will be at home, and I shall know. *Can* he be the man who has helped me so often before? If so, why did he keep his secret until now?"

He was shown in to General Anders, who received him with kind-hearted fury.

"You will never do any good in this world, Hetherege," he said, wringing his hand. "The whole thing is a smash, sir. We must stop, sir—STOP, sir—do you hear me?—and I shall lose £50. The Duke won't stand it, sir: he mentioned the *Gazette* to me at levée, angrily. *Gazette!* I shall be in the *Gazette*, and my poor little beggars will be cast into the street. Bankrupt, after so many years' honourable service to my country—£500 gone in one smash, all my poor savings of a lifetime. I am sorry for you, Hetherege—you always were a good, genial, biddable fellow; but you stand to lose nothing, because you have nothing to lose. You don't know what it is to get a snub from the Duke, and lose £5,000, as I do this day."

"£5,000!" said Reginald; "you began with £50."

"I say £,5000; prospectively, I grant you. I'll say £50,000 if I choose, sir. The property of that journal, well conducted, was worth all £50,000."

"He is not the man," thought Reginald, who said—"Pray, General, remember one thing—you insisted on conducting the journal yourself."

"I did, sir. I allow it. I did not blame you: dare you look me in the face and say I did?"

"No, General."

"Then don't bully me, sir. I am a quiet fellow." (He looked it, as he was rampaging up and down the room, with his clenched fists rammed to the bottom of his breeches pockets, and his face scarlet.) "But I will have you know, sir—ay, and I will have His Grace the Duke of Wellington know that I am not to be bullied either by him or by you. What are you looking at, sir? What are you waiting for?"

"I was waiting until you had done making a fool of yourself," said Reginald.

"Lord bless you!" said the General, sitting down, "we all do

it at times. I dare say you do, quiet as you are. There, it is all right; I sha'n't drop more than fifty. I did lose my temper, not so much over the fifty—though that is the deuce to a screw like me, who has to lie awake all night, thinking how the dickens he can live without getting into debt—as over the Duke's snubbing. We must not kick against the pricks. I am glad you came in, because I wanted some one to quarrel with, and you take it so quietly, and yet stand up in such a manly, kindly way, that you are the very best fellow to quarrel with in the world. Let us have a cigar. Hang this fifty pounds, though!"

"Does it really bother you?" said Reginald, when they began smoking.

"I should think it *did*," said the General, biting his nails. "I don't know where the *deuce* to turn for it. It is for compositor's wages, you see, and the other fellows' wages. I have paid down on the nail until now. I say, Hetherage, you have been very poor."

"Yes."

"Did you ever—I don't know how to speak exactly, but these men are to be paid this week—honour binds me, you know. Did you ever, eh?——"

"I don't know."

"Go to the—jewellers?"

"Yes."

"Would you go for me? I can give you diamonds to the amount of £100. Can you take them to a jeweller's for me? I *can't* go."

"There is no need, Anders. I can lend you £100," and he pulled out his notes.

There was no mistake about one thing—the astonishment of this General Anders was utterly genuine.

"Where did you get that money?" he asked, aghast.

"I don't know. Will you borrow some?"

"I will take fifty for a month, as you are in luck. Heaven is my witness I would have seen you further before I would have lent you fifty."

"I know that," said Reginald, laughing; "and I know, also, that you are about the only man in England who would have had the rare honesty to say so."

"To say what?"

"That you would have seen me further before you would have lent *me* that sum."

"Did I say that?" said the General, blushing deeply, "that was a most blackguardly thing to say. But I never can keep my tongue in order. It is true, however. The only words I ever had

with my poor wife, who is gone, were about that habit of saying what I meant. Shall I give you a bill ? ”

“ No, name a day : your word is as good as your bond. How many Anderses are there in the army of whom one could say the same ? ”

“ Well,” said the General, going over them on his fingers, “ there are only two generals in the King’s service besides me : you might say the same of both of them. Then there is another in the Indian service, but he is a lunatic—religious, or something of that sort. Reads the Bible, you know, and prays before he goes into action. Been in India all his life, and had a *coup de soleil*, for aught I know. As for the two men in the King’s service, there is Bob, that is my cousin, retired—the man the row was about with the organ-grinders—always disputing hackney-coach fares, you know ; fellow with a bumble foot and a cast in his eye. You must have seen him a hundred times at Crooks’s.”

Reginald had never seen anything of that establishment but the outside, and mentioned the fact.

“ True,” said the General. “ A-ha ! my boy, the play would be too high for you ; I have dropped my thousands there. Well, then there is Doddery Anders : you know him, of course. Bless me, I was forgetting the old fellow only died last week, and I have never called on him since. The poor fellow will be buried before I have time to leave my card on him. I must really go this very afternoon. Good-bye, Hetherage, and thank you. I will be true to the day, and thank you.”

Reginald departed, musing as to which General Anders it was who had done him this especial kindness. It was not his acquaintance, that was certain. It was certainly not the bumble-footed, one-eyed General ; that also was certain. It was not Doddery Anders either, because he had been dead a week. Therefore it was evidently the Indian General with the *coup de soleil*.

This seemed the more probable, as it was exactly the sort of thing which a man with a *coup de soleil* would have done. In fact, it seemed perfectly certain that no one short of a lunatic could have done it. Not that his Indian General was a lunatic—he was a most sensible fellow. No man could have behaved in a more reasonable way than to give him £200 to spend, and keep his son at college, without knowing anything whatever about them. Such things certainly, he argued, were more often done inside Bedlam in intention, than outside Bedlam in practice. Still, there were a great many people called mad who were not mad, and the

merchant Digby was a case in point. No, the Indian General was the man, and a most sensible fellow, too.

Yes; the mad General was the man. Yet, what did he mean by talking about an "old debt"? That, doubtless, was part of his innocent delusion. He was evidently the man; and he, Reginald, was bound in honour to make no inquiries, so he went home peacefully.

His friend General Anders never had a new Army List, from motives of economy, otherwise he would have known that there had been a new General Anders this four years—a man he had known as *Colonel* Anders, and whom he was to know better before he died. This was Reginald's benefactor. Reginald, however, settled on the Indian General, and remembered him in his prayers, as often as he said them, the Indian General never having heard of him in his life at that time, and, after having made his acquaintance, considered him as an objectionable person, entirely without any hopes of happiness in the next world, in consequence of his religious opinions, which were entirely different from those of the General.

One particular effect of the conversation between Reginald and his quaint honest friend the General was this: Reginald fixed upon the Indian General as his benefactor, and, retiring into his books, asked no further questions. We hope that when you see the real General you will not dislike him, or think that he is a lunatic in any way.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEIR TO THE PROPERTY IS DISCUSSED.

CHARLES, therefore, departed to Cambridge with money in his pocket. The least that Reginald could do was to ask the rector and Monseigneur to meet him at dinner before he started. They came, and everything went off very pleasantly. At half-past ten the two reverend gentlemen were in the hall, putting on their coats and hats. Monseigneur, who was nervous about the night air on his tonsure, had a natty little velvet cap, which fitted under his hat. In putting it on he dropped it, and the rector picked it up and gave it to him.

"Yes," said the rector, "you create wants, and gain your power by supplying them."

"How utterly dead your argument falls!" said Monseigneur, promptly. "What power is there in my poor little cap?"

The rector laughed heartily. "Well, I am no match for a Jesuit, and you had me there. I like to exasperate a Romanist, though, on every occasion."

"Your logic must be a little better before you exasperate me, you good man," said the priest, heartily. "But walk with me, I have something to say to you very particularly." And so they walked away.

"Will you come to my hotel?" said the priest; "it is close by."

"I will, with pleasure. I am unhappily a widower, and there is no one to wait up and scold me if I am late."

"A widower!" said the priest. "Have you any children, rector?"

"Yes; three."

"That was the unfulfilled dream of my heart. Yet why should I say so, for I have three whom I love most dearly, the sons of my patron. Enough of this—here is our hotel."

"Did you ever hear of Sir Walter Raleigh?"

"What about him just now?"

"Oh, many things. He lost his head for trying to do one too many. He was a hero; he discovered tobacco, a thing I like."

"Then we will smoke, if you never tell your bishop. Here are cigars. Now, forget all that I have said, and we will talk of your youth."

"What do you think of him?" said the rector.

"Well, I have been talking so very freely to you, that I will continue my confidence. I am glad you have won him; I could never have done anything with him—Heaven send you may."

"You really mean that?" said the rector. "But I see you do. I join in your prayer, and perfectly agree with you. He is a difficult subject. Now we are so comfortable together, will you tell me, as one English gentleman to another, what *do* you think of him?"

"I will, most heartily," said Monseigneur. "He is not to be trusted."

"Quite so," said the rector. "I have no doubt that his Cambridge tradesmen will be of the same opinion three years hence."

"I don't mean in monetary matters—I mean morally."

"Yes."

"He has undergone, in consequence of his late lamentable catastrophe, what you heretics would call——"

"I am not a heretic," said the rector; "the arch heretics are those of the Romish Church."

"You Protestants then——"

"I am not a Protestant, save always against the heresies of Rome. I am an Anglican."

"You Anglicans then—he has undergone a very rapid conversion, I should say too rapid a one; and I hope it may be as lasting. I don't think that it will, myself. There is a large spice of the old Adam in him yet, and it gets more obvious day by day, as he gets well. He is cursed with a genius or devil, and it shows itself in the rapid assimilation of knowledge, and incalculable speech about that knowledge immediately afterwards, without thought. He has immense powers of speech and argument, and I see nothing to prevent his becoming quite as shallow-pated a charlatan as the great——"

"He might do worse than that," said the rector.

"I think not," said Monseigneur. "But to go on. When you get under the outside crust of the boy, you find little except self-shness. At first, when he was fairly frightened, he ran to me; and I think you will say that I behaved well then."

"Most nobly."

"He, in his first religious exaltation, told me everything—how he had been tempted to murder his father, among other things. He will say nothing of them now. Have you noticed anything of the same kind?"

"Yes," said the rector. "While he was being shaken over the bottomless pit he seemed different to what he is now. But remember his youth, remember his life, remember his previous opinions, and hope for the best."

"I do," said Monseigneur, "but I cannot disguise from myself that I am glad that you are answerable for his soul—not I."

"Nay, nay, my good friend, I am not answerable for his soul. I think the lad has warm affections, and is capable of much good, and not a little evil. As for talking about the character of a boy like this, you might as well talk about a block of marble as a statue before Praxiteles got hold of it. Of course you are sore that you did not get him, but be fair on him. He will enter the Church as a matter of course now, and he will be a splendid preacher. I wish I had his way of putting things. To more worldly matters: the thing which will ruin a lad like him, is the expectation of money."

"Then this story about the will is true?"

"I suppose so. What do you know?"

"Come," said Monseigneur, laughing, "you are rather too frank, my friend. Tell me what you know first."

"Very little. Old Digby, in the last century, left his property to the devil, to prevent it falling into the hands of the Romish Church. Ever since which the Romish Church has been negotiating with the devil for it, hitherto unsuccessfully."

"That is very funny, Mr. Rector," said Monseigneur; "but, unfortunately, it is not true; and, saving your presence, you commit a piece of bad manners in making the joke."

"I beg a thousand pardons," said the Rector; "you correct me most righteously. I really know very little about the matter—forgive my poor joke."

"Forgiven at once. As for knowing anything about the matter, very few do. There are an innumerable number of claimants under this will, and at the death of our friend Reginald there will be an immense sum of money to divide. I have heard it said, on Jesuits' authority, that Charles Hetherage will take two millions of money."

"Two millions? That is impossible!"

"Well, I think not. Charles believes that he will come into a larger sum at his father's death, and that will make him very careless."

"But if there was any truth in this the Jews would advance him money."

"General Anders asked that question; not of the *Jews*, but of people who stand higher. The answer was that Reginald's life was as good as Charles's, if not better; that if Charles died without issue they were nowhere; and that if Reginald were to die out of the way, the Chancery suit might go on for another twenty years before any one touched one penny."

"General Anders got that opinion, did he?" said the rector. "And who is General Anders, and what earthly business is it of his?"

Monseigneur had said a little more than he meant. "You see, my dear rector, the boy believes he will have money, and that will do him all the harm in the world. Let us hope for the best."

"But who, in the name of all confusion, is General Anders?" asked the rector.

"Bless me!" said Monseigneur, "it is half-past one, and they have turned the gas off. Let me light you down. Mind that step; now there are three. Oh, there is the hall porter. Good-night, and good-bye; I am off to Henley to-morrow."

Naval and Military Intelligence.—General Arthur Anders, C.B., sailed yesterday for the Cape, in H.M.S. *Blonde*. In military

circles his mission is considered important. From the Cape the gallant General will proceed in the *Blonde* to Aden, at the mouth of the Red Sea, and Perim, an island in the neighbourhood. The *Blonde* will then pass up the Red Sea to Suez, at which point, it is understood, the gallant General will disembark and proceed to Acre.

That was Reginald's General Anders, and it will be a long time before they meet.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND STATE OF THAT MAN.

CHARLES returned dutifully to Cambridge, and no one knew anything at all about his affairs. He was received very well by all the dons, and only a few of the undergraduates had heard that there was a strange story about him.

What that story was exactly the undergraduates themselves could not make out. In fault of knowing anything about him, they invented several different stories. All these inventions tended one way—that he had had a desperate *affaire de cœur*, and that did him no harm at all.

He worked very hard at a college where he need not have worked, and then, *per contra*, he lived very expensively in a college where he might have lived cheaply. He was extremely religious in his way, and yet he and his friend, the rector, had a few words now and then about sumptuary extravagance.

“Charles,” the rector would say, “you are not keeping your first promise.”

“As how?”

“You are so extravagant.”

“I can pay.”

“I doubt that,” said the rector. “What did that ring cost?”

“£125,” said Charles.

“Is it paid for?”

“No; but it will be.”

“At your father's death?”

“No; I can raise money.”

“A hundred thousand times I tell you that you cannot. Don't be a perfect fool!”

“I do not think that I am.”

“There is nothing to prevent your being a beggar at present. In case of your father’s dying, you may have to wait twenty years for a sixpence. And are you moral? You went to Eton on charity—your father could never have afforded to send you there; and even now the money you spend on luxuries is out of your father’s pocket. Such is gratuitous education.”

Charles always turned the matter off at these points. There was money coming somehow, and so he did not very much care. His perfectly blameless life, and his hard and successful work, told well for him; still, the Provost and tutors lamented over a singular and remarkable extravagance on his part.

His old Atheistic theories were sent to the wind now. A certain division began at that time in the Church, and Charles took his side with the rector in the strongest manner. He was utterly indiscreet in his partisanship. Certain good men required a subscription for certain purposes, and had a sermon for the furtherance of their cause. Charles dropped his diamond ring into the plate (having no cash), which was not paid for, and which was politely returned.

He got a great deal of credit, both in Cambridge and in London. He was a ward in Chancery, and although cash was scarce—none, in fact, being obtainable in spite of all his efforts—yet credit was abundant. The only cash he had was that which he had from his father, which, as we know, came through General Anders.

When he entered holy orders he had these things in hand. He was third wrangler, and second in classics. He had a fellowship of £250 a year, and he owed £2,500. The fact that he had been quietly married, three months before he came into his fellowship, to a young orphan governess without a prospect, was a matter unknown, at first, to the world.

But so it was. There was no earthly reason for his getting married in that private way. Before he committed this crowning act of folly, he had made himself a name which would have pulled any woman through. He would have had to forfeit his fellowship, but he could have put a bold face on the world. To save the £250 a year he forfeited his own honour, and dragged his wife’s name through the dirt. He took his ordination vow with a lie in his mouth. He alienated every old friend from him except his father. Poor Mrs. Charles, in her anxiety about her firstborn, went to the rector and told him the truth.

The rector refused to keep the secret, and Charles was forced to acknowledge his wife and resign his fellowship. He had

entirely ruined himself, and the family were the first to acknowledge the fact. They had certainly never done much for him, but now they openly discarded him. Until Reginald's death he was nobody, and Reginald's quiet temperate habits were likely to keep him alive for forty years.

Five years of alternate success and disaster followed. Charles took to tutorship and preaching, and made a small success at the first, and a very great success at the second. He might have preached himself into a good living had he been left alone; but, in this wicked world, people who have money owing to them like to see it paid. His fellowship was gone, and nobody after that seemed to believe in his inheritance. At all events the Jews did not, and so Charles could get no money, not even at sixty per cent.

His creditors closed on him. Mrs. Charles exerted herself as far as she could, but, with all her fine words, she could not butter the parsnips. Cox and Greenwood wrote to Reginald to mention the fact that General Anders declined, for the present, to assist the Hethereges any further.

Reginald was not entirely broken-hearted by this. He had his £200 a year, and Charles got half the same sum for each pupil. There were no children alive, for the first two had died in infancy. It was when George was first born that the crash came.

Reginald had done all he could. His salary, such as was left of it, was secure for his lifetime, and he raised money on it to help his son Charles with his most furious creditors. By this act he made himself a beggar, and he had to go and live with his son Charles, eking out their income with his literary work. A garret was good enough for him, so long as he could keep the roof of it over Charles's head.

Reginald, Charles, and Mary really worked like horses to keep the house from ruin, but it was an extremely difficult thing to do. At the time when the first of his infants which lived, George, was born, Charles had but one pupil—George Barnett, its godfather, only son of the great county baronet, Sir Lipscombe Barnett, of Dorsetshire. From Sir Lipscombe Charles could often get an advance, though that awful personage had but little idea of the real state of Charles's affairs. Reginald also got plenty to do from the publishers, and was very well paid; but he, with the time consumed at his office, had not sufficient leisure to do any vast amount of his extremely careful and refined work. Charles actually advertised writing sermons, and got a good many, but it did not pay. He advertised for a religious lady in a clergyman's family, but he never got one. He then advertised for an imbecile

or aged lady requiring the comforts of a home ; and, lastly, for a lady of intemperate habits, desiring to be cured ; but in everything he failed. He at that time had a small church, with almost nominal duties, and an almost nominal income, which gave him abundance of time to use his talents for preaching nearly every Sunday ; but it went very little way. It was perfectly obvious that a break-down must come, sooner or later, and it came sooner instead of later.

For three years Charles had taken the summer duty of Arcis-sur-Mer, by which he got a holiday free of expense. This particular year he arrived at that watering-place before his congregation had come, or before the gravel was laid down at the *établissement*. So small a number had he of English permanent residents, that he considered it scarcely worth while to disturb the Huguenot minister, and held his services in the apartments of General Talbot, a distant relation, who acted as his churchwarden. London had got far too hot for him, and he had fled, leaving his father, his wife, his infant son, and his pupil, to take the best care of themselves they could with an execution in the house. Three of the four considered his retreat as one of the most masterly things ever done, and, never thinking of themselves, rejoiced in his safety ; for Charles was one of those men who somehow got all their women folks, and many of their friends, to take them at their own valuation. Young George Barnett (who, like almost every one else, succeeded afterwards in getting Reginald into trouble) considered his tutor as a model man, with perhaps a few of the eccentricities always to be found with great genius, and assisted at Charles's departure for Arcis with great shrewdness and devotion, forgetting, in the hurry of affairs which immediately followed it, to mention the matter to his father. How long he would have continued this very culpable omission, we cannot say—possibly until Reginald had written himself ; but the great Sir Lipscombe became acquainted with the state of things with his own horrified eyes.

Sir Lipscombe Barnett, on looking over his banking-book, discovered that Charles had drawn two quarters in advance, and was, at the same time, rather surprised that he had heard nothing very lately from his son and heir. The most anxiously indulgent of fathers, he at once determined to go to town and make inquiries of his son's welfare. He put on his buff waistcoat and trousers, his blue coat and brass buttons, and came to town, determining to hear a debate or so on the Reform Bill, then in the moment of projection in the House of Commons, before he went down.

On alighting at the garden gate before Charles's house, he was

surprised to see an abnormal quantity of straw and paper, not only in the garden, but scattered all about the road, evidently having connection with the rev. gentleman's house, for it lay thicker at his door than it did anywhere else. On knocking, he was at once admitted by a greyish, military-looking man, who drew himself up and saluted his old officer, and to whom Sir Lipscombe said, "What are you doing here, Malony? Have you left the army?"

"Yes, your honour; I have served my time, and I am engaged by Mr. Richards, the auctioneer. I am watching the few things which have not been sould, your honour."

"Sold! Has there been a sale here?"

"Surely. His riverence is sould up entirely."

"And where is he?"

"Divvle a body knows," said Malony. "You surely wouldn't have him here. Mayhap he's been trated so bad in this country, that he's gone abroad to convart the haythen."

"Where are the others?"

"Upstairs, in the top of the house, wid the baby. There is the scholar there that his riverence was teaching all the elegant diversions. I never——"

"Good heavens! my son!" said Sir Lipscombe, giving five shillings to the old soldier, and walking up.

Why had not his son fled to his aunt's—anywhere? What a scene for him!

Sir Lipscombe went up the bare staircase, looking into the empty rooms—so cheerless, even on the bright April day. How hollow and loud everything sounded! What echoes came to answer the intruding footfalls, as if ghosts of all the people who had lived and died there before were come to see how the last tenants had treated their old haunts, and in what state they had left them. The voices of some people talking upstairs sounded very out of place and loud, and when some one burst into a roar of laughter above, it sounded strangely—the more so as, in the laugh, Sir Lipscombe recognised the voice of his son and heir. It was a very catching laugh, however, and he joined in it himself, though in a more subdued tone.

Peeping into a top front-room, he saw the family group encamped there. Reginald was at a table, writing; on one side of the fireplace was Mrs. Charles, with an infant, and in the front of the fire was his son and heir, actually helping to cook the dinner, under Mrs. Hetherage's instructions. It was the laughter at this humorous arrangement which the worthy baronet had heard when he was coming upstairs.

He ought to have been very angry, but he was so very sorry for the Hethereges that his anger was changed to pity. Moreover, the chief culprit was absent, taking his usual course of leaving others to bear the brunt, and so there practically was no one to be angry with, except his son—and it was very hard to say what *he* had done. Besides, Sir Lipscombe was one of those soft-hearted men who can't stand the sight of a woman and child in distress; and that poor, pale, pretty, defenceless Mrs. Charles Hetherege, with her baby, sitting amidst the poor remains of her furniture in her dismantled nursery, made the kind widower's heart full in thinking of days gone by for him for ever. He advanced quickly, saying—

“Mr. Hetherege, my dear sir, you have been unfriendly in not writing to me. My good sir, pray tell me all about it at once. My dear madam, pray do not rise, I beg of you. Really, I am angry with you too; surely I am a sufficiently old friend to be trusted. Come, I must scold you. George, my dear, how do you do?”

“I was waiting for instructions from Charles before I could do anything, Sir Lipscombe,” said the poor lady.

“Surely, surely—quite right,” said Sir Lipscombe. “My dear Mr. Hetherege, I wish for a word or two with you downstairs;” and so they went into an empty room.

“Dear, dear!” said Sir Lipscombe. “I suppose, when things have come to the worst that they must mend, Mr. Hetherege.”

“They have not come to the worst, my dear sir,” said Reginald.

“Can that be?”

“We have a roof over our heads to-day, to-morrow we shall have none. She is rapidly sickening, and her life and the child's will be in danger unless I can nourish and house her better—and that baby the heir to millions!”

“Well, well! he must anticipate some of his property. I will lend the child a hundred pounds, and put it into your hands, to do as you please with; but the wife and child must be permanently provided for by a member of the family.”

“Ah!” said Reginald, with a great laugh, “but by which?”

“Is there more than one, that you could hesitate? Get that mother and child once inside Miss Hester Simpson's house, and I will be sworn that she will not go out again in a hurry. Don't you see what I mean?”

“I do—but I tremble.”

“Tremble at what? You are the only one of the family who was never afraid of her. She can't eat you.”

"But she hates Charles so."

"Bad taste on her part. When she knows what a perfect charming little jewel his wife is, she won't hate her."

"But I have given her such desperate offence. I have abused her novels so."

"The last woman in the world to resent that; you know she has never been different to you on that score."

"That is true; but how am I to manage it?"

"You do right to ask an old soldier. I will tell you how. Knock at the door when she is at home; go in—for you are never refused—show the mother and child into the dining-room, and go coolly upstairs and take the bull by the horns. Is Goodge in town?"

"No."

"Confound that fellow! he never is when he is wanted. Still I would only have used him after I had failed, were I in your place. You must do without him."

"It is a wild plan."

"It is a perfectly certain one. Another thing: has she or any one other member of the family been apprised of this child's birth?"

"No."

"That was extremely foolish, and the sooner it is known the better. You will see that for yourself if you think it out."

"Sir Lipscombe," said Reginald, "I am profoundly in your debt, and the thing shall be done, or risked. The deuce is in it if I don't succeed in such a good cause; but I wish Goodge was here."

"Well, I will make my adieux upstairs, and take the boy home. Let me know at once of your success or ill-success. I will write that little document upstairs, in case of failure."

From the parting scene between young George Barnett and Mrs. Hetherage and Reginald, few would have guessed that the boy was leaving a squalid, uncomfortable house, to go to every pleasure of a country house and the arms of an over-indulgent father. The boy cried heartily, and was so very sorry, that even the pleasures of the town, to which his father had resort to calm him, were only partially successful. Years after, when Sir Lipscombe joined in the great quarrel against Reginald, two parties, at all events, remembered his great kindness. But we must bid good-bye to him and to his son for a very long time, and follow Reginald while he unfolded to Mary part of his desperate project.

Terrified as poor Mary was, for the child's sake she consented to go and see the terrible Miss Simpson. And so those two

babes in the wood started together, taking the unconscious baby George.

CHAPTER X.

THE OGRESS'S CASTLE IS STORMED.

ALTHOUGH Reginald was very anxious to follow the suggestion of Sir Lipscombe, and get Mrs. Charles and the baby into Aunt Hester's house, he knew perfectly well that it would require all his audacity and courage to do it. "Once in," he said to himself, "the old girl" (so disrespectfully did he speak of that great genius) "dare not turn her out, for shame's sake; and Charles's wife is a woman who will win her way to any one's heart, leave alone that of a sentimental old woman."

Aunt Hester was so far from being considered in any way sentimental by the family, that they trembled when they mentioned Fitzroy Square—the square which was honoured by the residence of that great authoress. The younger and more audacious of the Talbots, Murdochs, and Simpsons, used flatly to refuse to go and see her on some occasions. She was extremely wealthy, having been left an heiress by a partial failure of the Simpsons' main branch. Whether she would take anything under the great will was not very clear, but she always said she would stand by her rights, if they were only fifty pounds. If the will was set aside to-morrow, however, she would have a fine penny to leave; and so, with the more thoughtful of the family—though most of them were very well off—she was considered as most eccentric relations are considered who have £3,000 a year and spend one, with the power of leaving it where they choose; that is to say, as a relation not to be lost sight of. Her money, if one of the Talbot or Murdoch girls were to have it, might bring a peerage into the family—a thing which General Talbot, of Arcis-sur-Mer, always prayed against.

From the conduct of Aunt Hester to her relations, however, the chances seemed very strong that the family would never be blessed with a peerage, unless they could get it with their own money. She seemed to entertain an objection to her relations quite as strong as that of the great Digby himself. She had made one exception, and that exception was so utterly hopeless a one,

that she was apparently confirmed in considering her relations as her natural enemies.

She had loved one of them, and there were dark rumours afloat about the strange old woman, to the effect that she loved him still. James Murdoch had been a handsome, clever, bright lad, when she took him up, sent him to school, where he did badly, and to college, where he did worse. He treated her with the most utter ingratitude. Some said—that is to say, her own servants said—that he robbed her, and got money by threats from her. She was not a young woman when she saw his evil boy's face, but even now, when she was getting old, it was noticed that this spendthrift and blackleg was never without money, and held his own somehow. The family's theory about him was that he knew something about her, and traded on it. Reginald, more shrewd in his way, saw the truth. Never having had a child of her own, she had loved and adopted this one, and though her heart was half broken by disowning him, she would not cast him entirely away. Perhaps that is why Reginald felt some confidence in his designs on this old woman now over fifty, whom he called a fool at one time, and a sentimental old woman at another.

"I wish," Reginald had often said to himself, "that she could have taken a fancy to my Charles, instead of to that fox-eyed young vagabond, James Murdoch."

But she never could, and Charles had always remained her pet abomination. These reflections forced themselves on Reginald's mind now, when he was going to thrust Charles's wife (whom Aunt Hester had never recognised) into Aunt Hester's house.

Aunt Hester had heard something of Charles's escapades, and from that day forbade any of her relations to mention his name in her house. Miss Rose Talbot, hearing of this restriction, called on Aunt Hester at once, though she had not been near her for a year, and persistently talked of no one but Charles. Aunt Hester was perfectly civil to her, and the day she was married to George Talbot, her cousin, sent her a splendid jewel, on which was engraved, "For her who spoke well, at all risks, of her unworthy cousin." That circumstance, among others, illustrative of the softer side of Aunt Hester's character, naturally came into Reginald's mind this day.

The society of Aunt Hester, like that of many great geniuses, could not be enjoyed without the persons enjoying it becoming aware of certain trifling matters of manner different from those usual among the mere herd. Aunt Hester, for example, used to say exactly what she thought, which was tolerably dreadful; but then, she would consider it necessary to say nothing at all some-

times during a whole visit, but sit looking at her visitor with a strong gaze from behind spectacles. She was also reported to have resorted to personal violence on more than one occasion, but of this there was not the slightest proof. Goodge certainly never denied it when he was asked about it, but became silent, and left her younger relations to infer what they chose; and they chose to infer that, on the whole, they had better leave Aunt Hester alone, which was probably what he wanted.

She tolerated from Reginald a great deal more than she would from any one else. Reginald was a poor courtier, and had actually done her considerable injury. He thought some of her novels nonsense, and he wrote reviews of them saying so. She was no less friendly to him after this than before; and although she never helped him openly, yet Reginald had some assistance from certain quarters, which he was often inclined to put down to Aunt Hester.

Aunt Hester still continued to dress in the fashions of 1815, which rendered walking exercise highly inconvenient for her, in consequence of the boys. She therefore confined herself to carriage exercise, and drove in her carriage round the park at regular hours in the season. Reginald calculated on those hours very carefully, and intended to arrive with his perfectly submissive companion during her absence. On arriving at her door, he was informed that she was at home, whereupon he said audibly to the butler, "Confound it! I'll see her, Jamieson." He indeed saw nothing for it now but to follow Sir Lipscombe's plan of the campaign. "Just wait while I help this lady in."

Jamieson showed the way into the dining-room, where the poor trembling lady sat down with the baby, and then took Reginald upstairs, announcing him.

Hester Simpson was sitting at a little table, writing. She rose.

A tall, hawk-nosed woman, with a pair of keen grey eyes and heavy eyebrows. Her grizzled hair was nearly as short as some boys', with only a few little curls in front. She was a woman of fine presence, with a well-formed figure. Her drapery was very scanty, though long, and her waistband was under her armpits. She swept a most beautiful curtsey, and said—

"To what have I the honour——?" when Reginald interrupted her.

"Now, don't get in a tantrum, my good Hester, but be a reasonable woman: you and I can be friendly enough if we like. I am in trouble, and I want your help—I must have it."

Aunt Hester sat down, put on her spectacles, took her cheque-book from her desk, dropped the pen in the ink, and said, sepulchrally—

“How much?”

“I don’t want *any* money, I tell you,” said Reginald.

Aunt Hester shut up her cheque-book, put it back in her desk, wiped her pen, took off her spectacles and put them in their case, and then sat utterly silent, waiting for instructions.

“I tell you I don’t want any money, Hester.”

Aunt Hester pointed to the last arrangement which she had made in her writing-table, elevated her eyebrows, waved her hands, and then folded them. Still she was utterly silent.

“Confound it, Hester, won’t you speak to me?”

“I was waiting for you to speak.”

“Well, then, I will. Charles is sold up, and is gone to his old quarters at Arcis-sur-Mer. His wife has had another baby born—a son and heir to a bedstead, a couple of chairs, and a million or so of money, and I have brought her here to be under your protection for the present, as she is far too ill to be moved about. You cannot, as a Christian woman, turn her out of your house, and she is downstairs in the dining-room now, with her baby.”

Aunt Hester suddenly arose and fell upon Reginald. She seized him by one breast of his coat with her left hand, while with her right she pummelled him soundly, until the dust flew out of his old unbrushed coat in clouds.

“Oh, you villain, you villain, you villain!” she said, when she was tired, and paused for breath.

“Are you better, Hester?” he asked, quietly.

She immediately flew at him again, and pulled his right ear violently.

“You are a villain!” she said when she sank down in her chair. “You have plotted that the child shall be brought into my house, and that it shall be under my protection. As for your worthless son’s wife, she shall stay here to-night, but I shall provide for her elsewhere in the morning. The hospital is the best place for her, but I will see to her for to-night—and to-night only, mind. You write to your precious son by this post, and tell him that. Tell him that he may make his mind assured of that. You leave my house instantly, Reginald. I never thought or spoke ill of you, and you have served me this cruel trick. It is unworthy of you, Reginald. I am a lonely old woman, and every one plots against me; *tu quoque*—the man I did trust before every one except Goodge. Go away, and tell your son that nothing shall harm his wife, but that out of my house she goes.”

“You will be kind to her to-night, at all events, Hester,” said Reginald.

“Am I a savage?” said Hester Simpson.

“ May I tell her so ? ”

“ That I am a savage—certainly.”

“ No, don't be silly. That you will be kind to her.”

“ You had just better march out of this house and mind your own business until to-morrow morning,” said Hester.

And Reginald, quite agreeing with her, departed hurriedly, past an astonished butler, leaving Aunt Hester a terrible figure on the lower stairs.

“ Where is Mrs. Prodit ? ” said Aunt Hester, in a lofty voice. Mrs. Prodit was the housekeeper, and was at once fetched.

“ Mrs. Prodit,” said Aunt Hester to the housekeeper, butler, and also the footman, who had joined from a laudable curiosity, and was detected putting his coat on before he had shut the staircase door. The servants were all attention.

“ In all well-regulated houses it is customary for servants to dress themselves in their offices, and not in the hall.”

This awful allusion to James disconcerted the party, and made James's face the colour of his plush breeches.

“ Mrs. Prodit.”

“ Yes, madam.”

“ I am expecting a baby and its mother——”

“ La ! ” said Mrs. Prodit.

“ And its young mother, to stay in the house for a considerable time,” continued Hester, sternly.

“ Pretty dear ! ” said Mrs. Prodit, not exactly knowing what to say in her astonishment.

“ I do not know whether she is pretty or ugly, Prodit. I suppose she is handsome, for these fools always do marry pretty girls. But I am not pretty, Prodit, and you are for a woman of your age : you women without any brains always keep your looks. It is the same with the men. If Jamieson there had not been originally ugly, he would have kept his looks till he was seventy.” (Jamieson was very handsome, like every one who was allowed near Hester.) “ You, Prodit, take your doll's face into the dining-room, and tell the lady that Miss Simpson will have the pleasure of waiting on her directly ; then come out at once. Jamieson, tell the coachman to slip round to the mews, and have the street laid down in straw at once—instantly. You also tie up the door knocker with a white kid glove, and, if any one calls—*any* one, mind—and asks how I am, say I am as well as can be expected. If you say one word more, old services shall count for nothing, and you leave my house.”

“ I beg your pardon, madam, a thousand times,” said Jamieson, “ but if Mr. Goodge were to come ? ”

“Of course, send him up directly. I forgot him—thanks, Jamieson, for reminding me. But I fear that there is no such luck to be looked for as his advice just now.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW HOME.

ALAS! poor fluttering, trembling, deserted Mary, where was she all the twenty minutes?

In the cold, cruel, inexorable dining-room of a power which she knew to be hostile, and which she feared to be inexorably so. “A mad doctor with a paying connection ought to furnish his rooms with dark mahogany, horsehair, and mirrors in black frames. He would never lose a patient as long as life lasted,” thought Mary. “I should soon go mad in this room.”

Here she made a low curtsy, and flushed up with a trembling at her heart. It was herself, or rather her shadow, to whom she was bowing, shown in one of the looking-glasses. She lay down on one of the cold black horsehair couches, and began to cry, and also to think. All this time little George was behaving as good as gold, as he continued to do during all which ensued. Let us pay him a compliment which we can rarely pay to babies or schoolboys; he was so little of a nuisance that we need not mention him any more at present, and only do so now to show that we have not forgotten his existence.

What an insane folly, she thought, she had committed in allowing Reginald to bring her here! and yet she had never known Reginald’s judgment go wrong. She knew, poor lady, that she was utterly beyond thinking for or helping herself, and so she must trust utterly to him. She could not understand, and had given up trying, for she knew from previous experience that she was beyond the regions of clear judgment. She would have given half her life to have had Charles with her now—her own gallant, brave, tender husband—who in their worst straits had given her the kindest words, and made fun of all their troubles. Poor boy, he could not be here—he would be in prison if he stayed in England. Reginald would not leave her—no, he would never leave her without assistance, in the hands of this terrible old woman.

She heard the front door shut, and looked out of the window. Reginald was crossing the square slowly, evidently in no great hurry to come back again. Then she felt alone and utterly deserted, and a dead sickness, which she knew too well, came over her.

Some one was in the room, who said—

“Miss Simpson, madam, desires me to say that she will see you directly.”

“I wish to be taken to a hospital,” said Mary, and, getting back to the sofa, sank heavily upon it, and became almost unconscious.

The door was opened again, and the terrible Hester Simpson, previously described, as far as our feeble art would allow us (she was infinitely more awful in reality), approached her. Mary knew it must be Aunt Hester, and feebly recurred to the request about the hospital.

“Why, my pretty one,” said Aunt Hester, kneeling beside her, “you are *in* the hospital. You are in my house, and you are going to stay in it until you are fit to go back to your husband.”

“Where is Reginald, madam? Let Reginald write and tell him that.”

“Good, to think of Charles first,” said Aunt Hester; “but the fact is, that I have packed Master Reginald out of the house with a flea in his ear. He is not going to play the fool with me, so I tell him. Now, first and foremost, what do you fancy? Are you hungry?”

“No, madam; but——”

“She wants champagne and water—that is what *she* wants,” said Hester, ringing the bell violently; “that will bring back her appetite. Bring some champagne here, some of you, or am I to be eaten out of house and home by idle servants?”

The champagne and water came, and it refreshed Mary so much, that she submissively mounted two flights of stairs; and after several efforts to thank Hester Simpson, which, like all other conversation, were nipped in the bud, she found herself in a most luxurious bed, in a handsome room, with waving plane trees outside the window. As she sank back among the fresh smelling sheets, she said lazily, by way of saying something—

“You don’t take long to air sheets, Miss Simpson.”

“My dear,” said Hester Simpson, “we always keep them aired for Mr. Goodge. You never know when he is coming. He might be here to-night, or he might not be here for three weeks. There are another pair airing for him now.”

“I hope I haven’t incommoded——” began Mary.

“What, Goodge? Bless you! no. He would as soon sleep in the sink as anywhere; and, in my belief, would, if he wasn't seen to bed like a Christian. General Anders says he would pull down a tatty and sleep in that if he could get nothing better. Does that noise annoy you, dear?”

“No, Miss Simpson.”

“It does me. It's his cockatoo, and if it belonged to any one else I would make the page wring its neck. But what I say is, when you get a real profound man of science like Goodge, you must allow for his peculiarities. Goodge's peculiarities show him to be the man of genius that he is. I said to him myself, ‘Goodge, you are a fool to go to Tackshend.’ He replied to me, ‘Hester, it is you that are the fool. Come also.’ ‘As what?’ I said. ‘As my wife,’ said he. But I did not see my way to it at fifty, and he not thirty-five, though he looks sixty. Well, now, my dear, a bit of this chicken, a little more champagne, and then to sleep. Reginald will be here in the morning.”

“I should like to talk a little to you, Miss Simpson,” said Mary.

“Well, do, my dear, if it does not tire you.”

“I am sure my darling Charles is very sorry for all that has happened.”

“So he ought to—I mean, no doubt he is, dear. An affectionate husband, I suppose?”

“The kindest, best of men.”

“With the best of wives,” said Aunt Hester, cheerily.

“I have done my best since the troubles came upon us. But I was only used to poverty, you know, and it came easy to me. Any home would be a heaven to me with him.”

“Well, everything will come right, I dare say. I am not going to give him money, because I might just as well put it into a watering-pot, and water the flowers with it. But I'll mayhap do so some day or another; and I'll consult Goodge. Come, I can't say anything more than that.”

Hester Simpson considered this tantamount to saying that she would behave in the handsomest way. Poor Mary was obliged to be content.

Reginald repaired to a coffee-shop, from which he wrote a succinct account of the day's proceedings, winding up by saying that, if Aunt Hester did not relent in the morning, he should make an effort to bring Mary and the child over to Arcis-sur-Mer. “The poor girl has been pining for you, my own boy, and I should be glad to bring you together. I can get leave from the office, and I have over £120. Expect us when you see us.”

CHAPTER XII.

CHARLES MAKES A FAILURE IN HIS SERMON.

“GIVE them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours : give them after the work of their hands ; render to them their desert.”—*Psa.* xxviii. 4.

Such was the text given out by the Rev. Charles Hetherige to the congregation of Arcis-sur-Mer in General Talbot's drawing-room. The *habitués* of the pretty little church in the Rue des Chènes at once settled themselves comfortably to listen to a good thing—much as in a theatre one settles one's self comfortably when the curtain goes up on a favourite, well-known piece, with a few of our best liked actors in it. A good thing seldom fails—men never get tired over *Hamlet* or *Twelfth Night*—the congregation knew from the text that they were going to have a denunciatory sermon from the Rev. Charles, against some persons unknown. These sermons used to come nearly every Sunday in the season, and no man could preach them better than the handsome temporary chaplain of Arcis-sur-Mer.

Among the permanent English residents, and among those of the visitors who stayed long enough to become initiated into the ways of the place, there were many theories as to the people who had so greatly aroused the Rev. Charles's anger ; for—although they might be the Assyrians one day, the Canaanites another, the Babylonians a third—it was perfectly clear, obvious, and evident that no man, not even such a genius as the Rev. Charles, could get into such a state of white heat against people who had been dead many thousand years, and who had never done him any wrong. It was certain that he had his enemies in the flesh, and that he used his pulpit, like some others of his reverend brethren, to ease his mind without the remotest chance of contradiction.

The young men of the small Easter vacation reading party were unanimously of opinion that the denounced ones were his University creditors, and that, as he could not pay them in cash, he took this rather peculiar method of paying them in kind. Their tutor, however, who had been a contemporary of the Rev. Charles, was of another opinion—it was evidently, from his point of view, the *London* creditors who were denounced. He was accustomed, in fact, to use the Rev. Charles Hetherige as an example to illustrate some of those invaluable pieces of worldly

wisdom with which, in more confidential moments with his pupils, he varied conic sections and Juvenal.

“See,” he would say, “what a fool a man makes of himself by getting in debt in London, where people won’t wait, when he may have any amount of tick at his University, where people will. Charles Hetherege might owe three times as much as he does, and walk the streets of Cambridge now.”

These invaluable bits of advice were treasured up and acted on duly by his fortunate pupils.

General Talbot, the gentle, wise Indian officer, who lived here for his health, and who was the richest of all Charles’s congregation, knew a great deal more about Charles’s enemies than any one else. He was Charles Hetherege’s churchwarden, his guide, and his friend. He knew perfectly well that the Hivites, Hittites, and Perizzites, who were doomed to eternal perdition in such masterly language, were only the people who refused to lend Charles any more money, or who impertinently asked for their own back again. *He* never was denounced from the pulpit. In the first place, he always did lend the money; in the second place, he never asked for it back again; and in the third, Charles never came to him as long as he had a franc to pay for his morning’s bath in the sea.

General Talbot used to say to himself, “The handsome scatter-brain genius is honest enough, after all. When he gets the money he will pay it, and I can’t see what is to prevent his getting it. The devil of it is that he can’t raise money on his chance.”

It was evident, on this particular Sunday (to General Talbot), that there was something rather more wrong than usual with the reverend gentleman’s affairs. General Talbot said once that his eloquence in the pulpit was so great that Arcis-sur-Mer would have gone into mourning had any one paid his debts and launched him on his legitimate career as a great popular preacher in England. Talbot said that people stayed at Arcis-sur-Mer on their way to Paris to hear him. The vice and frivolity of the latter city he continually denounced, pointing out, *per contra*, the gentle, pastoral life of Arcis-sur-Mer, of which town his churchwarden, General Talbot, used to say very little.

The English hotel-keepers declared that he filled the place, and would have died on their own hearthstones for him. If Charles had chosen to borrow money in Arcis-sur-Mer, he could have done it; but he was a queer fellow, and paid his way, partly with his own money, and partly with other people’s. He once owed a tradesman 1,000 francs at Arcis, and the tradesman

pressed. M. Victor, of the Hotel Royal, came to Charles Hetheridge, and offered him the money.

Charles Hetheridge said, "No, M. Victor—you, as a foreigner, have no security, as it seems to me. My English friends will all be paid when I have my own, either by myself or my family. But I cannot answer for any money."

Was this only to make a better name here than he had at home, or was it from real care?

Knowing this man, General Talbot was very much puzzled by the sermon. As a general rule his usual sermons were characterised by splendid eloquence, always manly, like the man himself, and never florid. He used to begin with a magnificent text of Scripture, written by the Jews, the first great nation of all time, and translated by the English, the second great nation of all time (as he, owing money to both nations was perfectly assured). Before you had recovered from his magnificent text, in which you were bound to believe, he at once made a splendid and audacious *petitio principii*, in which you were not bound to believe, but to which you were obliged to submit, because the rules of modern civilisation prevent you rising in your pew and telling the clergyman that he is talking nonsense. But when once you had swallowed the *petitio principii*, the man had you body and bones. He then became faultlessly logical, and if he had proved to you that Jacob wore Abraham's stockings, you would scarcely see the flaw in his *sorites*.

As a general rule, he was more logical in these denunciatory sermons than in any others. It is very easy to get up a case against the world; a man must be a poor fool if he cannot do that. The repentant garrotter, who has had the misfortune to hammer an old gentleman's head flat, tells the chaplain that it all came from his mother not having warned him against Sabbath-breaking. Any one can make a case against the world, and the Rev. Charles Hetheridge could make a very good one, all said and done. In these sermons he spoke only out of the lips of David, Daniel, Susannah, Mordecai, and other ill-used persons. Everybody knew he meant himself, even when he got logically furious about the wrongs of Susannah; but his argument was always good after the first start. On one occasion, by using an old argument about the divisions of the soul, he proved clearly, and in his best style, that he was three people, and that no one had been ever worse treated than himself since the three holy children.

Everybody, on the day of the sermon we speak of, was rather disappointed at first with it. The Cambridge men, who always

watched for his *petitio principii*, found it wanting ; there would be no fun for them at lunch. The ladies were utterly puzzled with him. General Talbot hardly knew what to think of it—his pet, nay, his friend, seemed to have lost his head ; he wandered from his text. He was furious enough and angry enough—some one had offended him terribly. Was it his bishop ? Was it any individual creditor ? That was hardly possible, because none of his creditors expected any money at present. Was it a French creditor ? He had none. There was some deadly offence given, however, and the Rev. Charles seemed very angry about it, though there was a strange light in his eyes which General Talbot could not fathom.

The preacher jumbled matters strangely. Magnificent and awful as his words were, even General Talbot could not follow him. He was putting the words of David, quoted at the head of this chapter, into the mouth of Hagar, when she was turned into the desert by Sara. His burning fury against Sara was something awful to hear. The young men from Cambridge, used to good sermons, looked at one another in amazement ; and Mr. Dormer said to his favourite pupil, “ I have never heard anything like this.”

All in a moment the preacher, in describing the desert scene, bent down his head and burst into tears, for the first and last time in his public life. He was no whimpering preacher—he despised a man who was capable of tears ; yet here he was, with his head down on the velvet cushion, not whimpering, like a beaten hound, but fairly sobbing from his great chest, like a strong man beaten down to the level of a woman by great, overpowering emotion.

“ My friends,” he said, when he raised his head, “ I beg your pardon for this emotion. I cannot explain it here. My heart is too full of mingled joy and sorrow to explain anything. Stay—some of you who have borne with my petulant ways so long deserve confidence. I have denounced Sara, departing from my text, and putting the words of David in her mouth. Will you forgive me when I tell you that Sara has sent Hagar into the desert as soon as Ishmael is born, and that there is no one to meet her there but myself ? ”

CHAPTER XIII.

GOODGE.

REGINALD, having written to Charles, found himself once more in the street, quite unconscious of what he was going to do with himself. He had been so long used to worry, duns, and vexation of all kinds, that he felt like a boy with a holiday. He considered what use he would make of that holiday, for he felt very much inclined to think that Aunt Hester would do no more than put Mary into lodgings, and see after her. However, she had a roof over her head that night, at all events, and he would enjoy himself. Where? Why, where an Englishman naturally goes to—his club.

He belonged to a cheap but very select club at the West End, which was instituted for poor gentlemen mainly, though frequented by many rich ones. His ten pounds' entrance fee had been paid long ago, and he had always kept up his subscription. Since the more fantastic of Charles's pecuniary irregularities, he had not cared to go there, for in the latter of the few years we have skipped over so cavalierly, Charles, also a member, had owed money to the waiters, had even owed money for cards, all of which he (Reginald) had paid, but which transactions were not in any way pleasant.

"I'll go, however," he said to himself. "*I don't owe anything. I shall meet some one there, and can get a bed at an hotel once in a way.*" So he turned south-westward, musing.

"Charles has made a fearful mess of it; he will never re-instate himself after this. Hundreds of men without a tithe of his prospects owe six times as much, but he owes it in such an absurd fashion. And adversity has done him no good. At the time of his great trouble, when those priests fought for him, I thought that there was some stuff in him, and that he would make a spoon, whereas he has only spoilt a horn. He has deteriorated very much—there is a total want of moral energy about him which develops every year. He does not drink, he does not do anything which you could exactly lay hold of; but in some of his moods he would laugh if his house was burnt down. He had a faith at one time, but I would not give much for it now. How he preaches so splendidly now without brandy, I don't know, but he is as sober as a judge; and yet, after a fit of apathy, put him in the pulpit, and there is no one like him. It is a puzzling world. It has treated me very well, however, and so I won't

grumble. I never pretended to deserve anything from the world at all: I made the fiasco far greater than any of Charles's and yet here I am with really all I want. Charles, instead of making one fine and really grand mess, as I did, has made fifty small ones, which in the aggregate do not amount to my one, and he is a beggar and an outcast, while I am in clover. By-the-bye, I have £100 of his which I must account for. What the deuce is to become of it? Here is another example of his way of managing matters. If I send it to him, I assist him in defrauding his creditors; if I don't, what has his wife to live on if Aunt Hester were to turn Turk? Charles was born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards. I'll pay that washerwoman out of it, though—be hanged if I don't! Good heavens! what an awful Bedlam that house has been lately; it is like awaking from an evil dream to get out of it.

He was awakened from his reverie by a smiling face, and he found that he had walked into the coffee-room of his club, and had sat down in his old familiar place. The smiling face was that of the steward.

"It is a pleasure indeed, sir," said he, "to see two such old faces, and yet two such unfrequent ones, on the same day, and in the same hour."

"You mean mine for one, I suppose," said Reginald, cheerfully, "and your own in the looking-glass behind me for the other. Though why you call your own an unfrequent one I don't know, for you must see it pretty often. Perhaps you have arrived at the same conclusion that I have—the older one gets the less one cares to look in the glass. The other face not yours! whose then?"

"Mr. Goodge's, sir."

"Goodge!" cried Reginald. "Where is he?"

"In the smoking-room, sir; just fresh from California—somewhere in the Indies. And ain't he laying down the law neither?"

Reginald asked if he had ordered dinner, and finding that he was alone, told him to order double portions, for that he should dine with Mr. Goodge.

He opened the door of the smoking-room, the first sanctum of that kind instituted at any club in London, and looked in.

Before the fire stood an immensely tall man, narrow shouldered, beardless, and without any colour in his face save a dark brown, evidently got from the sun. His hair was closely cropped, showing the splendid form of his skull. He might be any age from five-and-thirty to sixty: that grey blue eye, in its quaint expres-

sion, might belong to a clever, mischievous schoolboy; that firmly-set mouth, with the large, almost ugly jaw beneath it, belonged to a man, and no common one. His dress was well cut, but made to show his figure more than the common hideous dress of 1831, when handsome men like Palmerston or Melbourne swathed themselves up in the ghastly garments invented by an unhealthy king. His throat, for instance, was bare, and loosely knotted in a blue handkerchief under a turn-down collar; and that wiry throat was as brown as his face or his long sinewy hands.

Such was Goodge the traveller, as Reginald looked at him. He had only to say "Robert," when the giant strode towards him, and raised him from the floor.

"Here is a welcome for a fellow," he said, in his usual cheery voice. "Why, Reginald, I have got a hundredweight of talk to have with you! You must dine with me."

"I have made that arrangement already," said Reginald. "Welcome home, scalps and all!"

"Scalps, quotha," said Goodge. "Mind your own, you old capitalist, or that curly wig of yours, without a grey hair in it yet, as I see, will hang in a wigwam of the tribe of Murdoch some day. How's scapegrace? Over the water, I hear, saving *his* scalp. Well, Wolff says that the Indians are the lost tribes of Israel, but I'll be hanged if I wouldn't face all the Indians in America sooner than their brethren of Cursitor Street. Depend upon it, the lost tribes are not half so bad as those who have taken the trouble to remain with us. Here, however, is dinner. I am going to kick up a row with the committee, because there was no buffalo hump: it is just in season now. Well," he continued, when they were settled at dinner, "now tell us everything about yourself."

"Charles has not been going on well."

"He never did, did he?" said Goodge.

"I won't go as far as to say that," said Reginald, "but he is going on worse than ever."

"That must be pretty bad," said Goodge.

"It is," said Reginald; "there is no moral tone about him at all. He is sold out of house and home, and has left his wife pretty much on my hands. I have a hundred pounds of his, and I don't see what to do with her when that is gone. Meanwhile, she has a boy; the other two children died at once. I have a presentiment that this one will live."

"Well, we must quarter it on Hester, then," said Goodge.

"I have already done so," said Reginald—"prospectively, that is. I have got her into Hester's house. She declares that she will turn her out to-morrow morning."

“Fiddle-de-dee!” said Goodge. “Don’t trouble your mind about her. Hester would never do that: if she proposed it, I would forbid it. I thought you and Hester were at variance. How did you manage it?”

“The courage of desperation, which gives one impudence.”

“What do you expect from it?”

“I don’t very much know. I had an idea—you will think me a fool—that the child ought to be under her protection, for it has none other.”

“Not a bad notion. With a kind fool of a woman like Hester—a very good notion. What is the mother like?”

“A sensible, sharp, plucky little woman.”

“It is possible, then,” said Goodge, “that the child may not turn out as great a fool as its father. And so the Jews won’t have anything to say to Charles?”

“No; they don’t see their way to it. My life is as good as his.”

“And a precious sight better!” said Goodge. “Now, tell me fairly, do you expect that Charles will ever take anything under this will?”

“At my death there will be, of course, a settlement of some kind, and a vast deal must come out of the fire.”

“A great deal will come out of the fire,” said Goodge; “there must be a million, or a dozen, somewhere. With all that the lawyers have taken, there must be twelve millions at least.”

“There is nothing like that—there is nothing approaching to it,” said Reginald. “If it were the case, why have not my family moved more strongly in the matter? They never cared about the suit at all. And if Charles is to have such a vast sum of money, why have they not helped him more?”

“Because they are all rich, because you are eternally in the way, because your life is better than Charles’s, because half a hundred things may happen—there are innumerable reasons why they should let things drift. Charles has lost two children lately, for example. Will this one live? If it dies, what becomes of the whole will? The devil, to whom the money was originally left, can only tell; the lord chancellor could not. Old Thellusson made some wild provision, after scheming out an almost impossible succession, to spite his relation, that his money should go to pay the national debt. Do you think Digby was such a fool as that? *There is only one man alive now who ever knew Digby in the flesh intimately. He knew him as intimately as one human being can know another.*”

“Of whom do you speak?” said Reginald. “What you say is almost impossible. Any one who was old enough to know Digby

as intimately as you say, would now be between eighty and ninety, for he would not have confided his affairs to a man under thirty."

"Never you mind about that," said Goodge. "I am not here to mention the age of this man, of whom I am speaking. I only say that he is one of my most intimate friends. One of them—why, he is the truest and bravest friend I have in the world, and the best comrade in bush or jungle I ever wish to have. We shot tigers together last year—he wanted to show me the sport, and it is poor work. This friend of mine knew Digby well, and his opinion is that the whole suit, will and all, will blow up together, like a burst balloon, some day."

"Has he got any reason for thinking so?"

"Apparently not, or none which he would tell, even to me. I have told you more than I ought, Reginald, because things spoken over pipes in jungle or bush are not supposed to be repeated. I only tell you that I sometimes have a suspicion that the whole lawsuit is moonshine. The old man made his will to plague his relations: like all spiteful people, he has failed at present. Your grandfather was the only one he cared about and really provided for, and he and his descendants are the only ones who have suffered. My friend does not think that that was the old man's wish."

"Then you think——"

"On the contrary. I only suppose that the old man did not wish his money to be wasted entirely among lawyers, or to go into unworthy hands. Further than that I say nothing. I say that if you were to die to-morrow I would not give sixpence one way or another, unless something happened."

"And what is that?" asked Reginald.

"Never mind. I don't know, so how can I tell you? I want to say some more to you. You to a certain extent give your life to this son of yours—I know more about you than you have ever told me yourself, from a certain quarter. The boy began very badly; he mended for a while, and did well. He is now, according to your own showing, doing worse and worse every year. Did you do your duty by him, old friend?"

"No; I was a fool with him. I put notions into his head, or, rather, let notions grow there, which I should have combated. I let him have his own way too much. But what would you have, Goodge? He—the only friend I have—could I quarrel with him? I am so used to be blamed, that I am hanged if I care for it; but you are right in saying that I did not do my duty by that boy. If I had, he would have gone to the devil years ago."

This view of matters struck Goodge as something new. Never in all his travels had he met with such singular sentiment, and yet it was, apparently, true.

“I fancy you are right there, Reginald. You are certainly the only confidant he ever made. But I put a case to you. This child just born is a boy: will you allow him to grow up under his father’s influences?”

“I am not his father.”

“But would you use your influence with Charles to make him put the child under the care of other people, who would provide for him? I do not say separate him from his mother until his education began; I mean, do you think that Charles would to some extent give the child up to other influences?”

“I should say that Charles, the most affectionate fellow in the world, would never stand in his child’s light. But the child is very young.”

“Well, I can only tell you that the child has more friends than you know of. Could you do nothing with the father to save him from ruin?”

“Yes, if I could pay his debts and give him a chance of contracting fresh ones,” said Reginald.

“There is where it is,” said Goodge. “You yourself could have what you liked to-morrow; you had it once, and then you gave it all to him. I could get you money, if you could give your honour that it did not go to your son.”

“Ah! but, you see, I can’t,” said Reginald.

“It is a great pity,” said Goodge that evening to himself, “that that fellow Charles stands in the way so. Anders would do anything for Reginald if he could get rid of Charles.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AN IMPORTANT FAMILY CONCLAVE.

A MEMBER of the family, more than a week afterwards, coming to call on Aunt Hester, found Fitzroy Square down in straw, and the door knocker done up with a white kid glove. He at once drove round to the other members of the family, and announced that Aunt Hester was dying. An immediate family conclave was ordered, and invitations sent out for the next day, at lunch-time,

Jamieson, the butler, had merely done as he was told, and said that the lady was as well as could be expected. He had also added, on his own account, that she was very weak, and that they were very anxious.

The family assembled solemnly at the house of Alfred Murdoch. They ate their lunch, and then, instead of separating as usual, began to drink sherry. The ladies not only stopped with the gentlemen, but drank sherry also. Each member primed his or herself pretty liberally before any of them belled the cat. Everybody knew what everybody else had come about, but no one liked to begin. At a funeral the conversation is very often much more about the deceased's property than about deceased. So in the present case the conversation was led up to by the Mrs. Simpson of that generation asking the Mr. Murdoch of that generation over the table what he thought "Aunt Hester would be worth now."

"Three thousand a year, Jane, and has never spent £1,500, that is my opinion," said Murdoch.

Mrs. Simpson, a fat and viciously ill-tempered woman, whose fat has exasperated her temper, instead of softening it, as it does in most cases, replied—

"She has paid such sums away for that wicked boy of yours, that I doubt if she has much left."

Mr. Murdoch at once rose, and requested of Mr. Simpson to ask his wife "what the devil she meant by that."

Mr. Simpson, who, like most men with violent wives, was a peaceable person, begged Murdoch to pretermitt the question.

"They were not there," he said, "to inquire about the amount of Hester's property, but to see what the state of her health was, and, if it were possible, to find out what testamentary dispositions she had made."

He was proceeding to say that it was a matter in which they were all interested, when Miss Laura Talbot rose and spoke. Her words were very few. She only asked her Cousin Simpson whether her Cousin Murdoch had ever been in the dock for forgery, and then sat down.

The fact of the matter was that there was a blacker sheep in the Simpson fold than ever there had been in the Murdoch. Things not to be spoken of happen in the best regulated families. James Murdoch was a very great rascal; but George Simpson had come under the clutches of the law for bad spelling—he spelt some one else's name instead of his own. Let us hope that such mistakes will become less frequent with the spread of education. Miss Laura Talbot was, like most other young ladies, very fond of

James Murdoch, and although he had treated her rather badly, stood up for him because, as she had told her sister, Cousin Simpson's manner was enough to exasperate a mouse.

She, however, had rather rudely called her fat Cousin Simpson's attention to the fiasco of her firstborn, and had constructively reminded her of the £5,000 bail she had had to pay to get the sweet youth out of the country. It was necessary for Cousin Simpson to say something, or for ever to lose her position as being the worst-tongued woman in every branch of the family.

It is always supposed that she would at once have withered the audacious Laura Talbot, and left her in tears. But she never did so—she, like Bazaine, lost her opportunity. She often told her friends afterwards what she was going to say to that young lady, but she never said it. She was interrupted, as many another orator had been, by excited interpellations, delivered without previous notice.

“They did not come there to quarrel,” said one. “Pray,” said another, “let them discuss the matter in hand temperately.” It was unanimously voted that the family was to observe the utmost decorum, and the assembled members of it sat down with wrath in their hearts, to see if they could be civil to one another for the first time in their lives when gathered in conclave; though sometimes, when divided into groups, they got on very well, and only abused one another behind each other's backs.

They got on tolerably for a considerable time. The sherry, however, while it made the ladies amiable and even reasonable at first, acted differently on the men, who wanted to smoke.

The drinking even of the best brown East India sherry in the middle of the day would produce its effect on the temper of a saint. The family hauled Aunt Hester over the coals in the most handsome manner, under the firm impression that she was very ill in bed, and, in fact, bound to a better world. They were all pretty well-to-do people, and her property was not of very much consequence to any of them; and it had better be kept in the family. If she had made her will, why she had made it; anyhow, it would be better to know which way the money was gone—or, better, to see if any member of the family could use his influence with her to make her do her duty to her kindred, a thing in which she had been sadly remiss. At this point (of the sherry) there was not a more united family in Christendom, for each member had a son or daughter which he would have been most glad to marry to his or her cousin, provided extraneous cash was forthcoming. Aunt Hester's cash was, so to speak, extraneous, and any member of the family would have married his

son or daughter for it, though he knew that he gained the undying enmity of the rest of his kindred. It was a free game, like football: some one would have to kick some one else's shins in it, and apologise afterwards. But as no one was in the least degree aware as to whose shins were going to be kicked, or who was going to kick them, there was really no mutual animosity, and the whole matter might perfectly well be looked at quietly under a haze of sherry.

But "Canary" (which one may suppose the sherry of Shakespeare's time) is—says Mrs. Quickly—a very searching wine; and, as the conversation proceeded, the gentlemen of the party began to get snappish and fractious towards one another.

"Has any one heard anything of Cousin Reginald, lately?" said Mr. Murdoch.

"I should not much care if I never heard of him again," said Mr. Simpson.

"Very likely," said Mr. Murdoch; "but everybody may not be your way of thinking, you see. I rather like poor Reginald—he is nobody's enemy but his own."

"I ask your pardon," said Mr. Simpson: "he is my enemy, and the enemy of every one in this room."

"Pray do not enter into an altercation, Mr. Simpson," said his wife.

"I will not be quiet, I tell you, Jane," said Mr. Simpson, valiant with the three glasses of wine which he had taken. "I consider that Reginald could be very easily spared out of this world indeed. He has not adorned it so much as to justify him in living over sixty."

"He is not fifty," said Mr. Talbot.

Mr. Murdoch knew that he was about fifty, but as he thought it would amoy Mr. Talbot to contradict him, he did so, and said that Reginald was seventy. Reginald's name being thus brought on the carpet, a rather lively wrangle followed on the subject of the will.

"It would be a rather curious thing, after all, if Charles were to die without children," said Mr. Simpson. "He has lost two, and it is quite possible that he may lose another, or, indeed, not have any more."

"I would not take any more of that wine if I were you, Mr. Simpson," said Mrs. Simpson. "Your last remark was as nearly as possible imbecile."

"Yes," said Mr. Murdoch, "Simpson's last remark was not a very bright one, certainly."

"It was as bright as any you are likely to make, Mr.

Murdoch," said the offended lady, who allowed no one to abuse her husband but herself. "My husband has not much brains, maybe, but he has as much as some who think themselves wiser. I don't hold with the way he put what he said, but I hold with the substance of it. It *would* be a curious thing if Charles died without children; it would be curiously lucky for some of us. I don't know whatever he will do now, until his father's death—he can't go on as he is doing much longer, that is very certain."

"My firm belief is," said Mr. Talbot, "that if Hester had lived, she would very likely have done something for him, to spite the family. Perhaps it is better as it is."

There was a general murmur of assent. Mr. Talbot was, from that remark, head of the family for at least ten minutes.

"You are right, Cousin Talbot," said Murdoch. "Have you heard anything as to what is going on in the law business lately?"

"It is a dead lock till Reginald's death, I understand," said Talbot. "I am going to spend no money; are you?"

"Not I; Reginald is good for twenty years, and the suit is good for fifty. I have given up thinking about the matter." And they all agreed that they never gave the thing a thought.

The conversation had become general and noisy; it principally ran on the approaching decease of Aunt Hester. Mrs. Simpson by degrees talked every one else down by superior lungs, and possibly an extra glass of sherry. She was nodding the Paradise bird in her bonnet, she was smoothing her green satin gown with one of her cream-coloured gloves, while she extended her other arm, from which drooped a black lace shawl, oratorically. She was going away; her carriage had been rung for, and she stood up to conclude.

"Mark my words, my dear souls," she said, with her back towards the door, in the midst of a strange silence, which she was too excited to notice. "Mark my words, I say—that man Goodge has designs upon Hester, and it will be well if we are not all left out in favour of that man. If ever I saw villainy in a human face, I see it in the face of Goodge. You take my advice, you two gentlemen, the moment the breath is out of Hester's *body*, dash off to Fitzroy Square, and put your seals on everything, and see after the machinations of that villain Goodge."

She turned to go majestically, but brought up short with a loud scream. Goodge and Aunt Hester were standing before her, waiting until she had done. There was nothing for it but to roar with laughter—the discomfiture of Mrs. Simpson, the most dis-

agreeable of the whole kith and kin, was too absurd. It was exactly the joke for sardonic old Aunt Hester. Had Mrs. Simpson been less eager to hear her own voice, she might have heard the servant announce the new comers, but Aunt Hester had heard quite enough to suit her grim humour.

Still Aunt Hester looked like anything but laughing. Her air was wild, her eyes were red with weeping, and there was an appearance of horror in her face. Goodge, too, the man of a thousand escapes, looked very anxious and uneasy. There was something about the pair which produced a terrified silence among those who had been so noisy just before. Aunt Hester spoke with a trembling voice—

“ My dear souls, *have* you seen Reginald ? ”

“ No, no ! ” was the murmured answer from all quarters.

Aunt Hester began to weep again. “ He has heard all about it, and has gone, God knows whither. I fear he will make away with himself. I am afraid he has done so already, for he went away with nothing but his hat, the moment he got the news.”

“ News ? what news ? ” said Mr. Talbot.

“ About Charles, of course.”

“ What about him ? ” asked Mr. Murdoch.

“ Dead, dead, dead ! Drowned last night, coming across to see his wife. Alas, poor Charles ! alas, poor Charles ! ”

And they all echoed in a frightened whisper—

“ Dead ! ”

CHAPTER XV.

A POOR BUBBLE BURSTS.

A DAY or two after the descent on Aunt Hester, Reginald wrote to Charles to say that everything was going on well, and that Aunt Hester had entirely taken to both the mother and son. But by the next post came a letter saying that the mother had been suddenly and violently seized with illness, and was in danger.

Poor Charles ! What could he do. He loved his wife tenderly, and the thought of never seeing her again overwhelmed him. To go to England was madness, and yet how could he stay ? He took his griefs to General Talbot.

"My dear cousin," said General Talbot, "you ought to go, certainly, but the risks are very great."

"Well, I will risk it all. I would sooner go to prison than suffer what I do. She may be dead now."

"But the packet does not sail till the day after to-morrow."

"I wonder how much a fishing-boat would charge to take me across?"

"Make your bargain, cousin, and I will be your banker."

"When is there a tide?"

"At seven o'clock."

"Then I will go to Pollet at once."

The bargain was not long in making, for both parties were willing. A large fishing-boat with a crew of three men was hired, and they were to sail for Brighton on the top of the tide at seven.

General Talbot bid good-bye to him at the door of his house, and walked along the quay to the end to see him off. He had not long walked up and down by the lighthouse, when he noticed that Charles would have a wet passage, for there were heavy clouds away towards Treport, to the east, from which the thunder growled ominously. Still there was but little wind, and that off shore.

At last the long-drawn row of toiling women in blue and red petticoats with white caps were seen approaching. They were towing the boat out, whose sails were scarcely full.

When the women came to the end of the pier they ceased towing, and stood in a group, casting the tow-rope into the water. Then they began talking.

"Ha!" said one, "it is the luck of Père Roney always. He gets a fine price for to-night's work—five thousand francs, they say."

"But that is impossible."

"Truly, then, impossible, but true. He is paid beforehand also."

"I tell you," said another, "that the passenger is the Protestant clergyman, whose wife is ill, and that Roney gets two hundred and eighty francs."

The truth was unpalatable: women like wonders. The first speaker said—

"It is either Charles X., I tell you, or one of his court. Why, we all know that the King left Paris four days ago, and at once we have a stranger flying from our port. He is a great man, this one. If my husband had had the chance, he would have asked a thousand francs."

“And not got it,” said another. “There is the man, standing by Père Roney himself; it is the Protestant English minister.”

The boat was underneath the General’s feet now, and he hailed Charles.

“Good-bye; be sure you will meet her in safety. Good-bye.”

Charles waved his hand but said nothing audible, and the boat, catching the shore wind, sped away over the darkening waters, under the continuous blink of the approaching lightning. With a heavy heart the General turned away, with none but gentle thoughts for his eccentric and unfortunate kinsman.

The *Blonde* frigate, one of the swiftest of her class, was in the Channel, off Brighton, with orders to look out for any open boats or small craft making for the English shore. The astonishing events at Paris had only just reached London, and it was believed, in the highest quarters, that nothing short of a Red Republic would settle down on that unhappy city before the end of July. Some fugitives were, it was thought, very likely to make in open boats from Dieppe to Newhaven. The *Blonde*, having nothing to do, was ordered to look out for them.

The captain of the *Blonde*, looking at his glass and at the weather, and considering also that he was on a lee shore, sent down his top-gallant masts, and gave himself plenty of sea-room. He was wise. He would have liked to pick up Charles X., as well as another, but it was going to blow, and he had six hundred of the King’s men to think about.

The night of the 3rd of August, 1830, settled down with a most fearful thunderstorm from the south-east, followed by a gale of wind from the same quarter, so sudden and so terrible, that the *Blonde* put her pretty sides into it, and thrashed away to sea with every bit of canvas she could carry. Sudden and sharp as the wind was, it hardly blew long enough to lash up a sea, when it lulled for half-an-hour, and then came down again from west stronger than ever. The captain of the *Blonde* had been in the China seas, and had seen the same thing before; but the cyclone was a little too quick for him, and he lost his foretop-mast. During the temporary confusion caused by this, they sighted a fishing-boat flying French colours, with one rag of a brown sail (her jib), lying to, and apparently making good weather of it. She was undecked, however, and something was evidently wrong with her, for she ceased riding over the seas in a very few minutes, and went down head foremost, a little to the windward of them, leaving only one man visible, floating on a spare spar in the ugly cross sea,

It was impossible to launch a boat just then, but the *Blonde* would do anything but talk, and her head was put towards the Frenchman, who was now being borne rapidly towards them, clinging to a spar.

"It is an old man," said Tom Robertson, captain of the foretop. "You will let me go, sir, won't you?" And the captain of the *Blonde* said, "Yes."

Robertson, with a rope under his armpits, pitched himself into the sea just in front of the old man, who was driving upon them. The spar struck him heavily in the chest, but he held on, and brought his man alongside. When they got him on deck they found that he was very old, and that he could not talk English. It was Père Roney.

"You have had a narrow escape, my man," said the captain, in French.

"The devil drives when one has a handsome offer, and a rotten boat well insured. Hein! I am sorry for the young men, and I am sorry for my passenger."

"Who was your passenger? Was he escaping from Paris?"

"No. Had he been a Parisian he would have had the peculiar protection of the patron saint of Paris—the devil. As it was, he was merely a heretic, a sort of Christian, to whom the devil himself gives no protection. They say you should not sail with heretics, but this one has brought me good luck. I net a thousand francs by this. I never could have insured my boat for another voyage, so thanks to the ever Blessed Virgin. I will walk barefoot through the streets to her shrine for this."

"For your preservation?"

"No; for my new boat and my thousand francs in pocket. A man must die, and I am safe; heaven owes me much."

"You infernal, ungrateful old scoundrel! Who was your passenger?"

"The English Protestant minister at Arcis."

"Charles Hetherège?"

"Yes."

"Go and get yourself dried, you old rascal," said the Captain. "I knew that man somewhat," he said to his first lieutenant. "A great many people will be sorry for his loss. Goodge told me that he was the most splendid preacher alive. We must bear up for Portsmouth, and I will send an enclosure to Goodge to be forwarded, for I think he is in town."

The ship reached Portsmouth in ten hours. The letter to the Admiralty, detailing the reasons of the *Blonde's* coming into Portsmouth, reached Whitehall in nine hours. The Secretary to

the Admiralty was at his post, and he knew Reginald very well. Without forwarding the enclosed letter to Goodge, he wrote round to Reginald at his office, which was close by, and gently told him the whole truth as told him by the Captain of the *Blonde*.

Reginald read the letter, and then looked at the messenger. He was deadly pale, but he rose and got his hat and coat, and walking steadily, went round to the Admiralty, where he was at once admitted.

“Mr. Secretary,” he said, in a calm voice, “do you believe this?”

“My dear Mr. Hetherige, there is not the remotest doubt about the matter. Your son is drowned, sir. Pray do not build up idle hopes about his safety. God knows how I feel for you, and how every one feels for you; but I must say that, from Captain Arkwright’s letter, there is no doubt at all. I could tell you a piece of good news, sir, if any news could be of any value to you now. I heard your chief speak of it to-day.”

“What is that?”

“In consequence of your long and honourable services, your one mistake has been overlooked. You are not only reinstated in your original income, but you are raised one grade, and are considered as entitled to a pension, when the ordinary time of your service expires.”

“Yesterday I should have been glad,” said Reginald, “but to-day this ridiculous report has unnerved me. I am away to seek my son: if it is true, there is room enough in the sea for both of us.”

It was his not believing in the disaster at first which saved him from suicide or madness. He went away to the sea-side, not believing that it was true. But it was true enough. Charles was drowned on the very eve of a new lease of prosperity. Reginald’s last wild words being reported to Goodge by the Secretary, made him fear that the father would throw himself into the arms of his drowned son.

For two or three days there was an awful suspense in the family, for nothing at all was heard of him. The great case of the will was brought up again, after lying dormant so long: they talked of nothing else. If Reginald was dead, there would be a settlement, and the heads of the family began to hint to one another about a compromise. It was a terrible time for all of them. But at the end of a week he returned to Hester, quietly, telling her that he had been seeking for some tidings about Charles’s remains, and that he had satisfied himself that it was nearly impossible that the sea would give up her dead.

At Hester's solicitation he took up his abode at her house, and his temporary residence with her was soon recognised as permanent. Few ever knew how near poor Reginald, in the first burst of his despair, had been to a suicide, which the family thought would have solved much, and made most of them rich. Reginald never knew the deep curses which came from one throat, at all events, when he reappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

MENDING MATTERS.

FOR a long time the life of the poor widow trembled in the balance. For five long years she had stood faithfully beside Charles, through poverty and evil report, and now she only heard the news of better days with a dull, aching sorrow—he had been taken from her just as he would have been enabled to take his place in the world, wiser through misfortune, and with an increased motive for exertion should the child live. To her poor affectionate little heart every pleasure now became as pain, because he could not share it. The very beauties of her child were a disappointment to her, for they were admired alone.

It was determined silently by Aunt Hester, that she was never to be separated from her. Aunt Hester discovered that she had lived too long alone, and determined to have a little more company about her, in the shape of a brooding woman, and a melancholy, stricken, middle-aged man. The care of these two did her great good, and very much softened her heart towards her relations—even the implacable Mrs. Simpson. There is no doubt that had Charles lived she would have set him right in the world for his wife's sake, and have given him another chance; but it was too late—affairs were to take another course. It was pretty evident now which way Aunt Hester's money would go. It was a bad job, but it could not be helped, so there was no use thinking any more about it.

As Hester evidently, in remorse for her wicked conduct in shielding Reginald and Mary, and openly speaking of her testamentary designs on the baby, was more pleased than before to receive the visits of her relations, why, the relations had no objec-

tion to pay those visits. They were not only accepted, but returned. In a very short time Hester was received on familiar and affectionate terms by the family generally, as one who had been for a time estranged through a misconception which had now been cleared away.

Reginald also was in a very different position with his amiable connections. He was a well-to-do man now, and apparently a great favourite with the kind minister who had reinstated him : he had done yeoman's service, and had his reward. They treated him with great respect, and Reginald, though his hair got rather quickly white, was a very handsome and agreeable man, who might marry any day ; and should he show any tendency that way, he would find very little difficulty in being accommodated in the family. But Reginald had no such intention ; he was quite settled on far other matters.

Aunt Hester was found to be a most valuable person in the family conclave, as she was the only person who could manage the fat and furious Mrs. Simpson. Miss Laura Talbot always gave battle to that estimable woman ; but, though they might both scold themselves red, there was never any decided victory on either side. Aunt Hester showed herself mistress from the very first—after what may be called the reconciliation—by letting Mrs. Simpson scold herself hoarse, while she, on the other hand, sat perfectly dumb, looking at her. When Mrs. Simpson was morally and physically exhausted, and everybody thought it was all over, *then* Aunt Hester began such a withering onslaught on to the fat woman, that she was reduced to tears and a glass of sherry in five minutes.

Poor Mary was voted a very gentle and biddable person, with whom no fault could be found. The story went that Charles had married her for her wit : she showed none now—she seemed a peculiarly colourless person.

The child grew and throve amazingly. A child of many prayers and many anxieties, it was called George, after young Barnett and Mr. Goodge, the latter of whom was soon to be away again on one of his expeditions. Aunt Hester and Reginald had many a long talk as to the future : one thing was always determined on, that George Hetherage's education was to be diametrically opposite to that of his father.

Goodge demurred : he always did. " You should wait and see what the child promises to be before you decide. If he exhibits the same qualities as his father, educate him differently ; but if he seems different, why trouble ? His father had a very good education, but did not make a good use of it : some do and some don't.

Give the boy a faith of some kind, however, and don't leave him as his father was left."

And so time went on. There were many marriages and many funerals, among the numerous family, who were, between the weddings, generally in a chronic state of black for some relation or another. There were some great events, as when the Talbots moved to Highgate into a grander house, and when Mr. Murdoch's housemaid was murdered by the butler, who was hanged; on which occasion Aunt Hester made all her servants go to the execution, in order to show them the probable end of *their* careers. But in general they talked about little but dressing, eating, and going out to parties, principally among themselves and their own business connections. Something was occasionally heard about the Chancery suit, but no one cared much about it. When the suit had been started, fifty years before, there had been some interest in it. Two members of the family only were never mentioned, James Murdoch and George Simpson, though they were occasionally heard of—the first by Aunt Hester, the second by his mother. Goodge, after each return from his expeditions, used to ask if either of them were authentically hung, and on being told no, used to express the most profound disgust and disappointment.

With these few exceptions, there was nothing but peace within their walls, and prosperity within their palaces, while at the same time none of them got any younger. Meanwhile, a theory was erected by the family, which grew into a deep and settled belief. The theory and the belief alike were that they were the most profoundly respectable and prosperous family in England, and that, as there had never been any scandal in it in the past, so there would never be any in the future. James Murdoch and George Simpson were both alive, certainly; but in spite of those facts, the family passed into such a state of complacent infallibility, that Aunt Hester and Reginald began to believe in it. The attitude of the family was the attitude which the Papacy assumes at certain times, that of being beyond human accidents. We shall show how this illusion came to be dissipated.

Reginald grew more and more quietly famous in what was now the speciality of his life, theoretical finance. As a writer, he had few equals in this line, and his undoubted talents were such as to meet with solid recognition in his department. Mr. Murdoch, and other merchants not of the family, spoke of him as one of the longest-headed men of the day, as he certainly was theoretically. Murdoch actually offered him means to reduce his theories to practice. But Reginald at that time said no; that he preferred to study finance in the abstract, without any of the anxieties of

the concrete, which might disturb his judgment. A man who will decline a loan of ten thousand pounds for such excellent reasons, was, undoubtedly, the first financier of his age.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOOTFALLS.

ABSOLUTE silence in London proper is now almost impossible. Even in a place where there is no thoroughfare, a few footsteps are sure to break the stillness of the night, at uncertain times, and cheer the sick wakers with a sense of companionship. In a place like Bolton Row, with the narrow alley behind the Duke of Devonshire's gardens, into Berkeley Square, open to pedestrians at all times of the night, silence is never secured at all. Footsteps come and go until morning, with intervals long enough to enable the waking listener to give a character to each one in his imagination. He hears them coming in the distance; he says, now he is by that lamp, now he is by another, now he is passing, now he is between the walls, now he is in the square, for he is singing, and by the sound of his voice he is past the alley. It is easier to sleep in the noisiest thoroughfare in London where even the confused roar of the traffic becomes no more to you than the rhythmical breaking of the waves upon the shore, than it is to sleep in the end of Bolton Row, nearest to the Duke of Devonshire's garden, where each footstep becomes individualised.

Gentlemen who have been in the late bombardments have said that, after the first, silence awoke them more than the roar of the cannon kept them from sleep. The reason of this is obvious: the bombardment had become the normal state of things, and silence was a startling incident, not without hope of escape. So, at some time in the world's history, the cessation of footfalls in Bolton Row became events, because two who lay in bed together would say to one another, "He may come to-night; the next footstep may be his."

Watching at intervals, for many years, for the sound of one footfall among the many thousand which passed at night, is a habit which begets morbid dreams and fancies. With our two watchers, these fancies grew on them more and more strongly as many years passed on, and their wish was only gratified every two or three

years. They were a childless husband and wife, and they had peopled the house with ghosts before many years were over their heads. They had, after about ten years, filled the house with so many, and had seen them too, that they did not care for them. They were latterly much more fearful of robbers than of ghosts, and so they suborned a strong young man, of unimpeachable principles, to take care of them with a blunderbuss. This young man, who grew tolerably old in the service, was born on the second Friday in Leap Year, and consequently had not the power given to ordinary mortals of seeing ghosts and spectres. He being supposed to be an honest young man, always declared that he never saw any ghosts in the house at all, a fact which he attributed, most modestly, to the unfortunate day of his birth, adding that he was not to be blamed for it.

Consequently our couple never used to arouse the man in the mere case of a ghost, though as years went on they saw more and more. At last the husband, having seen a ghost in broad daylight, without the wife's assistance, Mrs. Dicker insisted that he should see no ghosts unless they were seen by her, and received the stamp of authenticity from her hand. "It was bad enough," she said, "at night."

It would have been very disagreeable at night, had they disturbed any one but themselves, but they never did: they lived in an atmosphere of complacent horror. There was a closed room in the house, at the back of the first floor, which contained the ghosts. Iron shutters had been put outside the windows when they first took possession, and they had closed the door with lath and plaster, and papered the same as the walls. Whenever the paper was renewed, the new paper was put over the old, so that the inhabitants of the room never had any idea of the fact that there was a room beyond. Yet this was the room where the ghosts lived.

In 1784 young Mr. Pitt, finding a deficit of three millions, boldly reduced the tax on tea, from fifty per cent. to twelve and a half per cent., so as to stop smuggling. It was a great success in the end, but for the time doubtful, and so he laid on other taxes with a view to avoid mistakes. Amongst other things he increased the window tax, and bade the collectors see that it was properly collected. Nay, if a Chelsea legend be true, he was riding down the King's Road, Chelsea, to meet the King, when he saw them building a bay window with three mullioned divisions. He at once determined that three windows should be charged for in such cases, and not one. The tax was more carefully collected. A certain sharp tax collector of St. George's, Hanover Square, noticed that there was a blocked window at the back of

No. 1, Bolton Row, which was not paid for. He entered the house to verify it, but to his horror he found that there was *one more window outside the house than inside*. The Dickers had to admit him to their confidence, and paid for the window. The collector asked, as a matter of curiosity, to see the room out of which the shut room opened, which the ghosts haunted. It was impossible to see the place where the door was. He never let the story out in its truth, for he knew the Dickers as acquaintances and regular payers, but he let out quite enough to frighten the watchman, and possibly the watchman (and the young man with the blunderbuss) frightened the thieves. No. 1, Bolton Row, got rather an ill name in the neighbourhood.

But not out of it. For many years—a few, indeed, before the footfall came at night for the first time—the house was well known, among a certain connection, as a fashionable lodging-house during the season. Possibly the first recommendations to it may have come from the “family” of which we have been lately reading, but from which we are at present dissociated. At all events, the Dickers and their house got a reputation for comfort, good cookery, and first-rate attendance, and were seldom without customers—getting large prices among the most *recherché* people during the season, and respectable prices off and on during the rest of the year. Possibly the guests were all born the second Friday in Leap Year, for none of them ever saw any ghosts; and as for the resolute young man, he was dressed in livery, and waited at table without the blunderbuss.

It was the ground and first floors that were let: the third floor, which was more handsomely furnished even than the other two, was kept sacred, amply swept and garnished, expectant of the footfall, though it might be far away, dragging wearily through the fever marshes of Holland, brushing through the vines of Spain, or awakening the echoes of American forests. All the house was furnished in a singularly luxurious manner, but the precious treasures were all collected on the third story. Sometimes a very favoured lodger would be allowed to see the rooms, which were always kept ready—there were few more sumptuous suites of rooms in London.

“I clean them with my own hand,” Mrs. Dicker would say. “My boy may come at any time, and he always comes at night, and on foot—that is an old fancy of ours. If he is killed, we shall hear the footfall just the same, for he will come to us in the spirit, if not in the flesh.”

The owner of the footstep had been bred in the house, which was the only home he had ever known. Until 1783 the step was

frequent enough about the house in every direction ; but then it went away for a time, and then the intervals between it became more and more lengthy, and the house, to its permanent inhabitants, more and more dull. At last, in 1787, the brightest creature which the house contained went away into the world, followed by prayers and tears. From 1790 to 1793 his absence was continuous, and at last a wandering soldier came to them and told them that their boy was lying wounded at Dunkirk. Three months afterwards, in the night, a halting step was heard at the door, and in two minutes a handsome young officer was in their arms—a lieutenant now, highly mentioned by the Duke of York.

As years went on, the boy officer became a man—captain, major, and at last colonel, covered with honour in every quarter of the world—always the hero of these two faithful old people. He kept to his bargain, half humorous, half melancholy, of coming back after a campaign at night, on foot and alone.

Time dragged along with the old people ; the roar of London invaded their locality, and rendered the passing footsteps a little more difficult to hear. The unimpeachable young man began to get mature in the service, but they still considered him a youth. The world had been fiercely ablaze ever since they had entered on the possession of that house, and wherever the fire had blazed fiercest their boy had been, not without glory, but very much the reverse. Wherever blows were going, he, backed by both luck and interest, was to be found.

He found time to get married, and to make a splendid match. He married the great East India heiress of the day, remembered by the dwellers in Bolton Row as a pale, feeble lady, who occupied the whole house for eight months, when she died there, leaving behind her the impression of a gentle, kindly woman, with nothing whatever remarkable about her except ninety thousand pounds and half a province worth of jewels, which were entirely her husband's property. The Colonel seemed to have found something more remarkable about her than her money, however, for he utterly refused to be comforted, and moped and brooded so about the house after her death, that they heard him tramping about the house, regardless of ghosts, at all hours in the night. He had never had time for love in his busy and continually active life. He had loved her with the passion of a man who falls in love for the first time at thirty-four, and she was taken from him before he thought that he had realised his happiness. She may have had faults, which he might have discovered later : she died in the odour of love's sanctity, and remained a saint to him, though she was but a kind ordinary mortal to others.

A short pause took place in his life after her death : his service had been almost continual since he joined the army in 1787, until 1802. The antecedents of his wife were little known ; very little more was known about her than that she was a great heiress, a little older than himself it was said, and that her name was Kitwell. Her father had been a friend of Clive and of Hastings, but had made most of his money under the Portuguese flag. No one remembered him very much, and in a few years no one thought of her. Still people were surprised at the Colonel mourning so much for such a rather second-class woman, whom he could not have seen very often before he married her, and who had left him worth half a million (in reality £100,000) of money.

He married at the Peace of Amiens, and stayed with her until she died in November. Then he mourned for her five months, living at the house in Bolton Row, during which time his footsteps came and went every night. The peace lasted but little over the year : during that time he had seen what perfect happy married life was, and the old people said, " He will marry again."

But he never did. The breach of the Peace of Amiens started him again, and Bolton Row knew him only at long and uncertain intervals. Meanwhile, his wife was the last lodger ever seen there. After her decease, and her husband's departure, no other lodgers darkened the doors except the permanent lodgers, the ghosts.

The old couple—for they were getting very old now—put the whole house in order for his return, but he very seldom came. The house was now his own. During the Peace of Amiens the old couple had made it over to him, with nearly all its contents, by a deed of gift, and only remained tenants-at-will. He accepted the gift with a laugh, and also acquiesced gladly in the provisions of their will, which he witnessed, thereby proving that he was not interested in it. He then went away, only to return thrice before Waterloo ; for, in good truth, what had once been his happy home, now only represented the grave of his dearest hopes, and Bolton Row for many years was hateful to him. He came to see the place only three times between the Peace of Amiens and the pause after Waterloo.

He never neglected his kind old friends. He would write to them from bloody fields after each victory (and there were little but victories then). He would say from Spain, at the end, " We caught them again yesterday ; if we go on like this you will hear my footfall on the stones soon ; " but the last they heard of them was when he came home on important business in

1812. He stayed three days with them then, and told them that he was General and C.B. Then he went away, and they found that he stayed at an hotel before he returned to Spain. "He has not forgotten her," they said; "he hates the house now, though he loves us as well as ever." Then he went back to Spain, to Wellington, and was in London no more until the great peace, though he wrote to them until the last, and after the last.

They wrote to him sometimes, but not often. The last letter they wrote was signed by both of them, and gave the General singular anxiety, although it was just after the battle of Vittoria, an event which had given him great personal satisfaction. What that letter contained is of no great consequence at present, but he considered it important and disturbing in the highest measure.

A brother general asked him if he had had bad news.

"I have had the worst of all bad news. I have to decide on a point of duty, and I cannot decide."

"Put me your case."

"The wishes of a dead man on the one side, and the possibility of preventing a great injustice on the other."

"H'm," said General H——; "you are a sound Churchman?"

"Yes."

"Well, neither the wishes nor even the bequests of dead men have found much favour since the Reformation. Do you suppose that Wolsey meant Christ Church to be what it is now?"

"Ay, ay!" said our General, "that is all very well; but, at the same time, suppose the dead man's wishes were those of the man to whom you owe everything in the world?"

"Well, Arthur, the man to whom you owe everything in the world is yourself: no one knows that better than I do. *But*, if you put it that way, respect the dead man's wishes, and let the injustice right itself."

"And either of us might fall to-morrow," said our General.

In the glorious confusion of events which hurled themselves so thick on Europe during the three years between 1812 and 1815, and which are so *consistently* vast, that the grand *bouleversement* of 1870-71 reads like a pantomime after a tragedy, the General was never in England at all until the autumn of 1815. It was entirely his own fault—he might have been in England fifty times over, but he always preferred some mission on the Continent. He cared little for England, for he said that he had few friends there, and had forgotten insular manners. On the night of the

14th of November, 1815, he delivered despatches at the Horse Guards, and turned away up Parliament Street towards Bolton Row.

"They will expect me," he said to himself; "they always wait for my footfall, and they must have got my letter from Paris. But it is cold, and London is hateful. Who could get men to fight such a night as this? The devil? If that arch rascal Napoleon, guided by his patron saint, could have come on London in a fog like this, he might have sacked the Bank."

It was a deadly night. The fog was so dense that the new gas, or, as he called them, gauze lights, could do nothing at all with it. His nearest way would have been across the Mall, but he preferred the streets. He had to ask the way of the watch twice before he could find Pall Mall.

He had a club there, one of the few there then, and he went into it and looked round. He had not been in the place for nearly four years. They had altered it, and there was a new porter, who asked his name. He gave it, and walking on into the coffee-room, sat down, and laid his sword on the table before him.

There was not a man in the room whom he knew. It was miserable—so many years away, and not a friend to welcome him—and the cursed fog was in here, too. He rose, put on his sword again, and went to the fire.

A waiter, seeing a general officer in full war paint and orders (he had posted to the Horse Guards, it must be remembered) standing by the fire, went up to him humbly, and asked for his orders.

"I beg your pardon?" said the terrible-looking General, very gently.

The waiter, alarmed at a gentleness very uncommon in those times, asked feebly if he wanted anything.

"Yes," said the General, "I want sun. I also want forgetfulness of the past, and guidance for the future. How do you get these things in England, you people? *N'importe.*"

The scared waiter, knowing nothing but his trade, said—

"Port, sir? Yes, sir."

"He is right, this fellow," said the General; "the climate would make Reehab drink. That is exactly the way some of our people have been managing matters lately. I never tried it in my life; I wonder what it is like? I'll try it: I want a little Dutch courage before I go out into the fog. But it strikes me that I am hungry; I have eaten nothing since breakfast."

The General soon found himself before a plate of beef, with a

bottle of port wine beside him. In a short time he felt better and more courageous. He rose, paid, gave half a guinea to the waiter for himself, and walked out with his sword under his arm.

"Pitt used to drink four bottles a day of that stuff," he remarked, as he walked along; "half a bottle is quite enough for me. I am perfectly courageous with regard to the fog now, but I doubt if my moral sense is any higher. Another bottle, and I would do the deed to-night. Shall I go back and have one? Why, no. Hang them all! Let them be plagued with the whips which they make of their own avarice. No, my father, I will do your bidding—at least for the present."

The fog was denser and denser, and when he had mounted into Piccadilly, and was walking westward, he could not tell where the houses on the other side of the street ended; but at last he found the east wall of Devonshire House, and guided himself by it until he came to the alley.

What if anything should be amiss? He had not heard from them for some time. What if they were dead, and had left the house with the secret room unprotected? He paused, and in mere absence of mind mechanically took off his cocked hat and looked at the feathers, while he drummed with his foot.

Not a step moved in the Row, and the front of the house was dark. He passed it stealthily and watched, then he came towards it quickly, at his accustomed pace, and knocked loudly at the door.

For a short time there was no response, and the footsteps were heard approaching the door. His heart grew cold within—they were steps he knew, but not those of either of his old friends. A man's voice said—

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Thomas, the General."

The door was at once unfastened, and a man admitted him, once the young man of the blunderbuss.

"You are welcome, General. God knows I am glad to see you."

"Is anything the matter?"

"They are both dead."

"I will come in," and he passed into the dining-room.

"And when did this happen?"

"Six months ago, General."

"And you?"

"I have done as they ordered; I have kept the house for you."

"Intact?"

"Perfectly so, General."

“ You have been a good servant, and you shall be rewarded. Have you been alone ? ”

“ No, General. The old people sent at last for Miss Mortimer. She came, of course, and has remained ever since. She has seen to all business matters.”

“ I am very much obliged to her and to you. Go and rouse her, and tell her I am here.”

“ I think it is unnecessary, General. I hear her coming downstairs.”

The door was at once opened, and a tall pale lady draped in black entered the room, with a candle held close to her face. She looked about forty, and her hair was looped up carelessly on each side of a calm, beautiful face, over which sorrow never seemed to have passed, if one only looked at it when it was animated, but which showed hard worn lines in repose. It was now animated. Isabel Mortimer advanced and kissed the General, who hastily returned her kiss.

“ Brother, dear, has Thomas told you that they are dead ? ”

“ Yes. Why, sister, you look young again ! ”

“ I knew your footstep, and I was ten years younger at once, Arthur. I have been waiting for your step a long while. Your clothes are ready in your room ; you have been so long away that they are old-fashioned.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

“ LIGHT some fire for your master, Thomas,” said Isabel, “ and air the sheets which are ready laid for him in the wardrobe in his room. You know where to find them. Now, Arthur,” she added, sitting down, “ you are come home to live with me at last.”

“ No, Isabel, I shall not be at home for long. But now, my dear, a hundred thanks for coming to my house so promptly.”

“ My dear, why should I not ? I sold the school, and was for the first time in my life an idle woman. I could do no less than come to them. They have urged me all their lives to come and live with them, but, as you know, I refused to eat the bread of idleness at their expense, and chose to provide for myself. I have worked on and made money, and they have left me all except the house and its contents. How much do you think ? ”

"I can't tell at all. In my father's time they saved much ; I cannot guess by a thousand pounds. I know that I witnessed their will in your favour."

"They have left me eighteen thousand pounds. Dicker had, from intercourse with our father, some of his knowledge of speculation, and his speculations turned out well. This eighteen thousand pounds will be a vast sight more some day. In short, I am a rich woman."

"They were a strange couple," said the General, thoughtfully.

"Yes, they were very strange. How strange it was that they should have loved us both so truly !"

"Eighteen thousand pounds, Isabel !" said the General, still in amazement. "Why, they were letting lodgings when they could have hired them."

"It is true. They gave themselves few pleasures in this world, and one of them was amassing money ; another was being generous with it to two people who had less than no claims on them. The solution is very simple : they had no children, and they loved you and myself. They gave me such a splendid education, that I utilised it for the sake of independence, believing them to be poor. This they disapproved of until I succeeded, and after that I was nearly as much a goddess to them as you were a god. Your footstep was more precious to them than mine ever was. *You know that.*"

"It is time you should rest, old sister."

"I *have* had a wearisome life, Arthur, and I want rest. I have worked so many years, that the past is only a dream of faces which I shall never again see as they once were. I am not old, yet I seem to have lived a hundred lives. Arthur !"

"Yes, old sister."

"How many comrades and friends have you lost in these wars ?"

"Ah, Isabel ! how many ? Nearly every one of them, so help me God !"

"Dead ?"

"Yes."

"And young ?"

"Yes ; for I always took to the young, even in preference to those of my own age. It was a peculiarity."

"And you have seen many of the young comrades you have loved lying dead on an honourable field ?"

"Ay, Isabel, I have helped to drag many fine young fellows whom I loved into the trenches before now."

"Thank God for it, Arthur ; it is better so. Have you never

thought so yourself? See, I will put it in another way: have you never seen a young man join your regiment who has not been killed, but has lived on, and have you never said, 'It would have been better that he should have fallen while some nobility was left in him, than have lived on to be what he is now'?"

"Yes, I have often envied the dead," said the General; "and some are alive now who had much better be lying under the Spanish vines. Well, sister?"

"It is the same in our profession, brother. I have sent girls into the world as I thought formed, but the world has spoilt them, and they have come to see me, vain, frivolous, worldly, silly, extravagant, having forgotten even the mere mechanical teaching which I gave them. Two, whom I believed angels, have dragged their names down to degradation, and have ruined families. I say to you, as I would say before God, that I have striven to do my duty by every girl who has been put under my charge. When they first came to me I studied their characters; where I found wrong instincts I combated them, where I found good ones I encouraged them. I made the mistake of trying to form God's creatures, in which he has put such infinite diversity of disposition, into Mrs. Hannah More's and Mrs. Chapone's models. I have made ten failures for one success. In spite of all I can do, the woman, shortly after she has left me, becomes very much the same as the girl was when she came to me, only her faults seem rather intensified. My forming is only varnishing, brother, after all, and the world soon rubs that off, and the real wood most inexorably appears underneath it. I don't know anything about boys. I consider them a mistake on the part of Providence. You may be able to form a boy after he is ten, but you can't form a girl—at least, *I* can't with my system."

"Yet you have had great successes, sister. Your name ranks high."

"Yes, with girls who were made too good for me to spoil. My girls are perfect gentlewomen; no fault can ever be found with their manners, and they know a great deal; yet two of them have turned Roman Catholic, and two—never mind—they are not received. In short, I have toiled hard, and have made a failure. Do you know why I have failed?"

"Because you believed that every girl and woman was as good as yourself."

"Nonsense! I have failed because my profession was to train girls for the world. What do I know of the world? Why, absolutely nothing. I ask you how could I? I was only a nameless, penniless child, from some whim of our strange father's utterly

unprovided for—but for those dear folks lately dead I might have gone to the workhouse. Well, no more of that—it was long before I knew that you were my half-brother. I had no means of knowing the world. As a governess, what could I hear? and when, through my own exertions, I made a connection, what could I learn? In that set the very book of the world is closed. I sent my girls into the world utterly innocent, to sink or swim. Most of them have swum, thanks more to themselves than to me. I am tired of the whole thing, in short, and I am going to see the world for myself.”

“You can’t do that, my Isabel; you can’t know about men.”

“I don’t want to; I want to know about women. If I want to know about men, I can always get the truth from you.”

“Yes; and you propose——?”

“That you should let me have this house, and I will start as a fine lady. I am not old, I am not ill-looking, I have money, I have a connection, I know as much of society as will keep me in talk—there is nothing to prevent my seeing this world into which I have sent so many girls.”

“As for the house,” said the General, “why, it is yours as long as you choose. No one knows who you are.”

“Oh, no; the secret has been well kept. I am not sure that I know the whole truth myself.”

“Take the house, my dear, by all means, and ask me to your parties. You will end by keeping a school for dowagers. But, Isabel, come upstairs with me. Do you know the secret of the house?”

She looked so puzzled that it was evident she did not.

“I see you do not,” he said, when they were on the third floor. “But here, beyond this room there is a third. If you have this room re-papered, keep the old paper up.”

“Another room?”

“Yes. Did the old folks say nothing to you about it?”

“Not a word.”

“Did they ever mention anything?”

“Never one word.”

“It is, perhaps, as well,” he said. “The secret of Vittoria shall be kept. I say, Isabel, have you seen anything of the great family lately?”

“I see some of them, sometimes—Miss Simpson oftenest. I have made a very queer discovery.”

“What is that?”

“That not one of the living members of that family have the remotest idea who you are.”

“That is extremely amusing,” said the General. “Now bed, my dear, and to-morrow an inventory of the furniture. They don’t know who I am, that is very good. Pray do not tell them.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A MARRIAGE, AN ADOPTION, AND A CAUTION.

WHEN the General and Isabel Mortimer came to examine his inheritance, it was found to be far more valuable than he had any conception of. The more valuable of the things, the rare carpets, the pictures, the wonderful china, had been carefully packed away at the top of the house, and such as required attention or airing, had had it from the methodical old couple, so everything was in excellent order. There was lace in old drawers; there was one glass cabinet filled with miniatures, many of them set in diamonds. The furniture which had been in use was good, but a great deal was packed away which was better. Neither the General nor Isabel were surprised when they found that the Diekers had insured the contents of the house in the *Westminster* for £18,000.

“And so you are going to lend me all this,” she said.

“Everything, for as long as you like; you, in fact, keep house for me. You had better send to the bankers for the plate.”

“I shall have a start in life. Some of my old pupils will die of envy at this lace. I shall have to set a new fashion.”

“What is that?”

“That of appearing without jewels, for I have none.”

“I won’t *lend* you any jewels, Isabel, but I can *give* you some. I should not like to see you in jewels borrowed even from me.”

“No, I will not take any jewels, Arthur. I will set the fashion of going without. I shall puzzle people quite enough with what you have lent me, without being hung over with jewels which I shall be supposed to have stolen.”

No. 1, Bolton Row, very soon began to be a famous house, and people said, “See what a woman makes by keeping a boarding-school for fifteen years.”

Miss Mortimer, ex-boarding-school mistress, started in society in a very modest manner, but she soon had a very considerable and select circle about her. Her introduction to that society was from the families whose young ladies she had so perfectly trained

that they were actually recognisable as *her* young ladies ; until, as she herself expressed it, the varnish wore off, and the real wood appeared underneath. She made no pretensions, and was very humble. Miss Hester Simpson, an acknowledged wit, said that she made her way by talking three foreign languages fluently, and not wearing jewels. Though she wore no jewels, she wore what was more startling ; she was always dressed in black satin or black velvet, with a prince's ransom of lace over it. She never yielded to any fashion at all ; she never did anything with her hair except dress it *à la Madonna* ; her dresses were always worn high, with a little frill round her beautiful throat, and long, simple, sweeping skirts. She was the ideal of *Il Penseroso*.

A woman who never asserted herself, who had a house full of things as valuable as the things in Manchester Square, though fewer, and of whom no one knew anything save that she was very clever and beautiful, and talked three languages, was a great success. *Il Penseroso* was a politician too, and could hold her own with most people. Men of eminence began to be seen in her rooms, and she paid her court to them very dexterously, but independently. She astonished a high official once, by putting him right (let us suppose by a million or so). She had got it all up that morning, and quietly *forced* him to lead the conversation to it, as a conjuror forces a card ; and after she had done it she apologised, saying, " You see, sir, that although we women do not pretend to anything like originality, yet we are a thousand times better than men at details. When I was a poor struggling governess, I should have sent my favourite pupil to bed for such an error as your clerks have committed."

" I wish I could send the leader of the Opposition to bed," said the Under Secretary. " So you were a governess, Miss Mortimer ? "

" Yes, I rather miss my occupation now. I have lost power, and that, according to Chaucer, is what women love best. It is a great thing to be able to send any one to bed who disagrees with you, is it not ? Don't you wish you had the powers of a poor governess, sir ? "

So it was said among men that that curious woman in Bolton Row had got a good deal to say for herself, and knew more than most women. A great many men came to Bolton Row, and among them a great many foreigners. One foreigner came more often than others. Thomas, of the blunderbuss, now a butler, and fat, used to let this gentleman in in the morning, and treat him with great civility. Thomas was under a very strong impression that this foreign gentleman would very shortly be his master.

From ISABEL to the GENERAL, at Edinburgh Castle.

“DEAR ARTHUR,—Tell me all you know about the Prince d’Amandvilliers. He was sent here by you. Give me his character.—ISABEL.”

The GENERAL to ISABEL, Bolton Row.

“DEAR ISABEL,—Unless very much changed for the worse, D’Amandvilliers is brave, just, affectionate, honest, and rich. I took him prisoner at Vimiera, since which time we have been fast friends. He is one of the finest fellows I know. I imitate your brevity and your extravagance. You have sent four lines for eightpence—I send twelve. Why did you not get a frank?—ARTHUR.”

ISABEL to ARTHUR.

“I did not get a frank because I was in a hurry. D’Amandvilliers wants to marry me, and I should like to marry him. Will you let me?—ISABEL.”

ARTHUR to ISABEL.

“You can’t possibly do better.—ARTHUR.”

ISABEL to ARTHUR.

“MY DEAR ARTHUR,—I would not be absurd, if I were in your place. You say nothing about that of which I wished you to speak. I have accepted Louis, and we are going to be married, now you have given your leave. But can I keep this house on? Can I retain my present position. He is only prince, with fifty thousand francs a year. He may not be Due de St. Privat for ten years more, for his father is not likely to die. I have explained my position to him, and he says, ‘If your cousin likes to lend you the things, why let us use them; if not, we will take another house.’ Let me know how I stand.—ISABEL.”

ARTHUR to ISABEL.

“DEAR SISTER,—The house and its contents are entirely at your service for a perfectly indefinite period. Tell D’Amandvilliers so. You have explained, of course, to him all you know or guess about your parentage. That, with a man of his strict honour, would be *most necessary*. With D’Amandvilliers you may do anything except deceive him.—ARTHUR.”

ISABEL to ARTHUR.

“DEAR ARTHUR,—I told D’Amandvilliers all I knew or guessed about myself before I allowed him to conclude his proposal. I have never mentioned my real relationship with you. With such a man as he, would it not be better to trust him with the whole truth? I thank you a thousand times for your generosity; but I am perfectly certain that it would be much better for you to take Louis into your confidence entirely. He has trusted me so truly that I think it would be ignoble on my part if I did not urge this on yours. Remember, that he still believes you to be my cousin, and cousins do not always behave to their cousins as you have towards me. Think of this.—Yours, ISABEL.”

In four days the General was in London, and closeted with the Prince d’Amandvilliers and Isabel. The arrangements among them were in the highest degree satisfactory. The General was to keep the third floor nominally, and the Prince was indoctrinated into the mysteries of the closed room. He enjoyed this mystery immensely, and nothing stood in the way of the marriage save the fact that the Duc de St. Privat, in the most emphatic way, absolutely refused to allow it to take place until he had the pedigree of Mademoiselle written down by the College of Heralds and signed by the King.

The General at once departed with a laugh to Lorraine. The Duc was not inexorable by any means. The General, so well known and distinguished, was the xenos of his beloved son. She was a Protestant, and why not then? There were Catholics and Protestants; he (the Duc) was, for his own part, Voltairean, but went to mass—*saprieti*? Why not? The lady had no pedigree: his son must find enough for both. The lady was forty and more; well, his young rascal was nearly fifty, let him not pretend to be less, and it was high time that he settled. In short, certain monetary explanations, combined with the extremely agreeable manners of the General, softened matters amazingly, and the marriage took place, Isabel becoming the Princess d’Amandvilliers, and being presented at the Court of St. James’s.

Some happy years passed after her marriage. It had never been expected that she would have children, and so the absence of them was not felt as a disappointment.

After some years, however, all cards of introduction were addressed to the Prince and Princess d’Amandvilliers and Miss Murdoch,

“My soul!” the Prince had said one day, “you are dull at home sometimes.”

“Not with you.”

“Nay, but without me. Did you ever think of adopting a child?”

“I have thought of adopting some one, and bringing her out, but not a child.”

“It is equal to me, so that I make you happy.”

“You have done that already; but as you mention the matter, there is a girl who was with me for some time, whom I should like to see again.”

“Her name?”

“Helen Murdoch. She was my favourite pupil. I should like to see her again; and she is an orphan, living now for a time with an aunt. She is dull there, and I do not think that her aunt cares for her. She would be happier with me, and I am sure the family would not object.”

“Has she a family then?”

“O yes; the great family—the family of the Chancery suit. She is a ward herself, I believe. If she is, I am sure the Chancellor would not object.”

“I should like to catch him objecting to anything you desired. I would—— But of what family do you speak?” said the Prince.

“Oh, the Digby family. Their name is legion—Simpsons, Murdochs, Hethereges, and Talbots.”

“Let her come at all events, if she is willing,” said the Prince; “preliminaries are soon arranged when every one is willing;” and James Murdoch’s sister was introduced into the house.

At this time her brother was going through one of his repentant resurrections, and was experiencing a radical and permanent reform of his evil courses for about the fifth time, with such assistance as he could get from Aunt Hester which assistance was by no means so easily obtainable now she had new cares and new affections to take part of his place in her warm old heart. The Princess had the very strongest dislike to him, but she could not interfere between brother and sister. James Murdoch could come and go in the house as he liked, and his sister adored him.

The Prince and Princess never had what is called “words” from the day on which they were married until the day on which death separated them. They never quarrelled, and almost always agreed on everything. Had they been foolish

people, they would have had their first quarrel about this man ; as it was, they had a decided difference of opinion, but argued it out with the most perfect good humour, and, without abating one jot of their opinions, remained as affectionate as ever. The Prince conceived a strong liking for this handsome young Englishman ; Isabel disliked him like poison—unjustly, her husband thought, for he had the manners of a Frenchman—had been very much in France—and was a pleasant contrast to the boorish young Englishman. Were not French manners in men better than English ?

“ Undoubtedly,” said his wife ; “ but as a rule I dislike Frenchified Englishmen, and I have reasons for disliking this young man. He is heartless, and he has given much trouble to tender hearts. Besides, there are many things—I do not know what, I say—the General distrusts him. I beg you, my best beloved, to be careful with him. *Do not let him sleep in the house again.*”

The Prince pulled a long face and whistled. “ Do you mean——”

“ I don't mean anything, you foolish man. I mean that he goes to bed and gets up again when we are asleep. He walks in his sleep : I met him three nights ago, on the stairs, fast asleep. O yes, as fast asleep as a weasel.”

“ What was he doing ? ”

“ Sleeping.”

“ Well, perhaps he had better somnambulise in another establishment,” said the Prince ; and in fact he did not sleep in the house any more. It is possible that he might have slept there once too often.

CHAPTER XX.

REGINALD GETS A PRACTICAL HINT THAT HE IS IN THE WAY.

BEFORE Reginald's first crop of troubles was well over, he used to go very seldom to his club, as we have mentioned before, but used to get his dinner in the middle of the day somewhere, very much depending upon the money in his pocket. He was much employed at one time by a certain very famous publishing firm at the West End, who were bringing out certain important articles

of his. It was necessary that he should see them nearly every day, and as their office hours almost exactly coincided with his own, the only time for an interview was during the two hours in the middle of the day which he devoted to dinner. Nothing, therefore, was more natural than that he should seek out a modest house of refreshment in the locality, which was at once cheap and secluded. Such a place he discovered in a street near Berkeley Square, which suited him exactly.

It was a clean eating-house, connected with and yet partly disconnected from a superior sort of public-house. The eating parlour was approached by a private entrance, but with only a partition half-way to the ceiling, so that the private guests, mainly consisting of clerks or superior shopmen and some tradesmen, had the benefit of the conversation of such gentlemen as used the public parlour of the public-house. This, though certainly a drawback, was not a great one, for, from the conversation in the parlour, Reginald guessed that its occupants were only upper servants, and that the place seemed to be select.

He got to like the place, and to be liked there as a quiet, inoffensive gentleman. "After all," he said to himself, "it is quite as good as the club, and much more private. Nobody ever talks to me here, and I can read the newspaper, or look through my proofs, without minding any one or any one minding me." So the habit of having his chop there in the middle of the day became a fixed one with him, and when his brighter days came he still used to step round there to have his lunch almost every day, though his club lay half-way between his office and the "Swan," and directly in the route.

One day he was at his mutton chop and *Times*, when two people came into the next room, and began talking in a low voice. To his unutterable astonishment, he heard his own name mentioned twice.

What could this mean? Had he a right to listen? He did so, and at first heard little more. Then a man came in, and said, "A pint of brandy, gentlemen," and he heard it paid for, and partially drunk before the conversation was resumed. It was then obvious, when the talking began in a higher tone, that one of the gentlemen was like the brandy—that is to say, partially drunk.

"You see," said another voice, incontestably sober, "you stand to lose nothing at all. Whatever comes, *you* are safe. You have blabbed quite enough in your drink to put yourself in my power."

"Ay, master, and you have said enough to put yourself in

mine. I have drank heavens hard for many years now—that bursted old house would make any man drink. But no man ever saw me drunker than I am now. I assimilated it by degrees. Give me another glass of brandy, and I shall be sober. I am never wrong after the middle of the day. It is only the mornings which play the devil with me.”

The glass of brandy was drunk, and the man’s voice was totally different.

“Now, Master Murdoch,” he said, firmly, “I am a man, your match, or any one else’s. They never dream that I drink at home; the Prince has a high opinion of me, but treats me as no Englishman ought to be treated by a Frenchman. *She* hates me, and I am sick of the old place. What is your little game? I’ll reel it off for you and save you the trouble of speaking. Your little game is to know what I choose to tell you. What do I know?—I know what I do know, and what you want to know. Was there a document?—Yes, there were a document, for I have heard the old ones speak of it when I have been listening. Where is that little document?—I know where that little document is, and so does another. What does that little document contain?—I don’t know and I don’t care. What do I think you want that little document for?—Why, to take and burn it. What do I want for that little document?—I want ten thousand pounds for that little document, in cash, and not in promises. Will I give you the whereabouts of that little document until I am paid?—No; I’ll see you further first. Did you try to find that little document for yourself?—Yes, you did try to find that little document for yourself, and the Princess a-ketched you on the stairs; that’s what she done. A-ah!”

“Well, I suppose you had better finish up that brandy and go to — as fast as you can. I can do nothing with you, and I believe that you are a humbug. When I first asked you to drink with me, which was when my sister went there, you gave me the first hint of the whole business when you were drunk-sober. I suppose, now that you are sober-drunk, you will deny it.”

“Not I. I did tell you part of what I know. I thought you would make it right again with Miss Simpson, and that she would give you anything. You have been a fool with that old woman, and your time is short with her unless you do what I always have done, keep up a show of respectability. You can’t pay for my secret, and I must take care of myself. That old house sees my back very shortly.”

“Have you saved much?”

“Devil a farthing to speak of. I have been quietly drinking

most of it away for many years : what I have saved I have given to my mother."

"If your secret is of such value, why do you not lower your terms and see what I can do?"

"You see your character ain't good," said the drunk-sober man, with amiable frankness, "and you in consequence can't depend on your Aunt Hester. Besides, I am afraid that another knows it."

"Who? Come, I will give you five pounds if you will tell me. Is it Reginald Hetheridge?"

"No."

"On your soul!"

"Yes."

"There is your money. Here is another five pounds if you will tell me who *does* know it."

"The General, I am nearly sure."

"The devil! But the secret is no use to him."

There was a dead silence, which was broken by the tipsy man beginning to whistle.

"Well," he added, "it is all over. You can't pay me, and you must go back to your original proposition of putting Mr. Reginald Hetheridge out of the way; forcing on a settlement—which no one would oppose now, for they are all sick and tired of the matter—and going to the devil with your share of the swag. If that were to happen I might be inclined to engage, for a reasonable sum, that yours truly would take care that the little document was not in any way forthcoming. Meanwhile the General is a sharp man, and I don't think I shall be on the spot to watch him, or to burn the house down."

"Would that be necessary?"

"Pre-eminently so; that would be the first thing. Who gave you the office about that document now?"

"Why, you did yourself."

"To be sure, I forgot; and nobody knows what is in it. That is so odd. The old ones didn't, the General can't, and I'll be d——d if I do."

"I dare say that it is of no value."

"I dare say it is, though. You somehow know something more than I do about it, or you would not be so keen."

"I swear I know nothing more."

"You swear! Yes, but who the devil would believe you?"

"You insolent scoundrel, I will denounce you to your master and mistress."

"And I will denounce you to your Aunt Hester. Come,

keep your hands off that bottle. I am three times the man you are ! ”

No more was said, and they left the room. Reginald dashed out of the door, and was in time to see them depart by another. They came together. One was a very handsome and well dressed man, whom he at once recognised as James Murdoch ; the other was apparently a butler, for he was dressed in black, with a white tie. The two worthies parted, and Reginald confronted young Murdoch.

“ You do not know me, sir ? ” he said, quietly.

“ I confess that you have the advantage of me, ” said the other.

“ I am Reginald Hetheridge ! ”

“ My dear cousin, ” said the other, coolly. “ I am most delighted to know you. As the grandfather of the future head of the family, I bow down before you. I should very much like to make your acquaintance. ”

“ The feeling is quite mutual, I assure you, ” said Reginald.

“ Will you dine with me ? ” said James Murdoch.

“ With pleasure. To-day ? ”

“ By all means. Say at the Bedford, at eight o'clock. ”

Reginald was there at the time appointed, and found the dinner table laid in a private room, and James Murdoch waiting.

“ Will you have a glass of sherry and bitters before dinner ? ” said James Murdoch. “ I have been having one, and have filled one for you. ” Reginald took it with a smile.

“ Cousin, ” he said, “ do you ever drink two glasses before dinner ? ”

“ Well, I am afraid I do, ” said James. “ The fact is, we do drink too much about town. ”

“ Will you drink two to-day if I do ? ”

“ With pleasure. ”

“ Then drink this, ” said Reginald.

“ Nay, I am not going to drink two before you begin, ” said James, turning pale.

“ But to please me, ” said Reginald.

“ Well, give me hold of it, then, ” and Reginald handed it to him. He pretended to put his lips to it, and with a curse threw it violently on the fire. The spirit in the wine flashed up blue, and then a lambent green flame began creeping about among the coals.

“ I think we understand one another now, cousin Murdoch, ” said Reginald ; “ or shall I speak more explicitly ? I wish you a good afternoon. ”

“That is a murderous young vagabond,” thought Reginald, as he walked away homewards. “I must warn Hester about him. The question is whether she will be warned or not. She wraps herself up in those idiotic novels, so that she would never be convinced that there was a murderer in the family, however often she might find it necessary to describe one. However, here goes ;” and when he got home he wrote—

“HESTER,—Have you made your will in favour of James?—
REGINALD.”

This he sent downstairs to her by the page, for he did not want to talk to her, he would have had possibly to say more than he wished. She seemed to have understood this, for she sent her answer back by hand. It was concise.

“No.—HESTER.”

Reginald's answer was :—

“MY DEAR HESTER,—I am very much pleased with your reply. Don't make any kind of will at present in favour of James, and *make the fact notorious*.—REGINALD.”

Answer :—

“DEAR REGINALD,—I know what you mean ; but you need not fear. I will save him from the temptation of wishing me out of the way.—HESTER.”

CHAPTER XXI.

A YOUNG LADY APPEARS ON THE STAGE.

A RATHER unexpected circumstance occurred immediately afterwards. Thomas Morris, butler to the Prince d'Amandvillers, was brought before Mr. Harrison, at Bow Street, charged with robbing his employer.

The Prince d'Amandvillers, who was accommodated with a seat on the bench, said: “The prisoner is my butler. The

Princess had him with a character of thirty years from the late occupants of the house in which I now reside. I never had any reason to suspect him of anything, except lately I thought that he drank too much. I had gone to bed on the night of last Friday, when I was aroused by a knocking at the door. I discovered him to be in the hands of the police, with the things I see produced in court upon him."

"Are these things yours, Prince?" said the attorney defending the prisoner.

"No," was the answer.

"Are they your wife's?"

"I don't think that that matters."

"Perhaps not, Prince. Will you swear that your landlord is not the prisoner's brother?"

"I never heard of it," said the puzzled Prince.

"Very possibly," said the attorney, "but will you swear it?"

"No."

"Will you swear that the prisoner is not brother to the Princess, your wife?"

There was a ghastly silence. The Prince buried his head in his hands, while the whole court waited for his reply. In a moment he saw that it was possible. In a moment he saw that he did not know *who his wife was*. He knew not, and, as far as he was concerned, cared less. But if this could be proved, it was ruin to her—to her who was all the world to him. She might be the sister of all the convicts in New South Wales, but she was his Isabel. Still he was a Frenchman, and a match for all these insular idiots. The audience watched the bowed head as it slowly rose from between the hands; the face was convulsed with laughter, and peal after peal went ringing through the court. It was infectious, and "the gravity of the court was visibly disturbed."

"I apologise for my laughter," he said; "but what will you? Yes, I will most emphatically swear that this man is not the brother of my wife. Will he call his own mother, the former charwoman, to prove it. If he does not I will. Ask the prisoner if, when he put his mother into Pettit's almshouses, she had not to produce her marriage certificate, and the certificate of his birth. I, in the unutterable astonishment of your impudent question, forgot this, and became confused. I have been used to live among gentlemen, and the facts I hear about dogs like this are not always to be remembered at once."

What the Prince said was, unfortunately for the prisoner,

taken for truth. The prisoner was none other than Thomas, whilom the young man with the blunderbuss, who had drank hard and secretly for many years, and who, as he had confessed to James Murdoch, did not always know what he was about in the morning. In a crapulous state, after a night in the cells, he had suggested this audacious line of defence to his attorney, but in a confused way, forgetting that he had told the Prince a totally different story. He was remanded, sent for trial, and convicted. On his trial he caused his attorney to make his counsel ask such singular and absurd questions, that the court got impatient. For instance, the Princess was called to swear to the things taken on him. The counsel asked if they were hers. She emphatically swore that they were. That was true at the time, because the General had given them to her in order to simplify matters, and avoid talk ; but it was certainly not true of them when they were stolen ; at that time they were lent. The prisoner, who was suffering slightly from delirium tremens, in consequence of many years' habitual liquor being suddenly stopped, made a rambling statement, which was attributed to that malady. When he came to stating that there were more windows in No. 1, Bolton Row than would fit the rooms, the judge asked him if he thought he was doing himself any good by talking such nonsense as that. When he complained that his attorney had refused to call a certain window-tax collector (who had been dead some years), the court stopped him. He was transported for ten years.

That was satisfactory, so far, but Isabel's position had been endangered. People in this world do not, as regards a woman, care much who she was not, but they do care about who she was. If a woman has no pedigree, it is of no very great consequence ; but if she has a bad one, it matters a very great deal. Isabel had no pedigree, and was safe ; a single objectionable relation would have ruined her. Even as it was, the world had to be satisfied about her once more, and there was nothing to satisfy the world with. The world was quite happy to believe that she was not any one at all, but now the question was aired, they rather wished that she had been somebody. At length, however, a French friend of the Prince d'Amandvilliers hinted that there was no actual proof of her being a Doria, which made every one at once firmly believe that she was.

So that small storm passed over, and one of the dangerous men was happily transported. The other one, James Murdoch, transported himself. He was caught cheating at cards, and slapped in the face by Lord Peterton. That young gentleman

expected a challenge from him, but as none came, he was cut; and on the settlement for the Derby was found to be £2,000 to the bad. This Hester of course refused to pay, and James Murdoch left England and went abroad once more, indefinitely.

Indefinitely, because he could not show among gentlemen; but he was very often in England. On these occasions he was generally arrested, for some small debt, by the first tradesman who caught him, at which times he was always paid out by Aunt Hester, and sent abroad again. This process was repeated as long as there was anything to pay, and then James Murdoch was free of England once more, though he was not free of gentlemen's society, as he had utilised his various returns to England by proving, beyond all doubt, that he was the real hopeless blackguard which the world had always supposed him to be.

The Prince and Princess d'Amandvilliers would have nothing to do with him; but his sister would sometimes see him privately, and give him money. At one of these interviews he told her something which sent her home with a very scared look.

The kind Princess had the secret out of her in no time. With shuddering horror she told her kind second mother that her brother had asked her to let him into the house at dead of night. The frightened girl said that there was a secret in the house which he wanted to discover, and that she was terrified.

"Well, my dear," said the Princess, "there *is* a secret in the house, and the General means to keep it for a time, on foolish grounds, I think. In my opinion Master James would be none the better if it was revealed, but we do not know in any way what it is. Pray never talk about it unless you talk about it to your brother, and tell him that he is a fool."

Miss Murdoch, the beautiful girl, with £10,000 on her wedding-day, was not married so quickly as some people thought she would have been. There were one or two things to account for this. In the first place, her brother was a sufficiently notorious rascal, and although a man of the world may be perfectly willing to marry a young lady, yet when it comes to marrying a disreputable brother, he thinks twice. As a general rule, the brother of the object of a man's affections is almost as important as the lady herself, if he is in any way presentable or respectable. We knew a gentleman of high family and great wealth who married a labourer's daughter. The brother of this lady, whose daughter is one of the highest and most beautiful ladies in the land, carrying a title dear to every English heart, was not

presentable, in a social point of view, but eminently good and respectable. For him, nothing was too good to the day of his death; his brother-in-law loved him, and took care that he should die rich. Most men are not ashamed of such a brother-in-law; but a man of the world must be very desperately in love with a woman to marry her if she has such a hopeless sponging cad of a brother as James Murdoch.

The men of the world, we say, fought shy of this match. Many men not belonging to the world were very desperately smitten with Miss Murdoch, and would have married her. The only objection to this arrangement was that she did not care for any of them. Her friends thought that she would have, at one time, accepted almost any presentable man who would have given her a grand position, and have tried to forget her only love. Such a man did not offer, and she was spared the trial of marrying a man first and forcing herself to love him afterwards. When a woman marries a man she does not love, and who knows it, it must be rather uphill work for the woman without great assistance from the man. Given that assistance, all may, and probably will, go well, but after-marriage courtships are dangerous unless there is determination on both sides. The French, on the whole, find them succeed; but then the French are infinitely more polite and attentive in little things than we are. *Petits soins* have as much to do with domestic felicity as anything.

There was another and a stronger reason, possibly, than all the others which we have set forth above, which prevented Miss Murdoch from marrying. She happened to be in love with Captain Hickson. At first she did not quite know her own mind about him, and at one time she might have been tempted to marry elsewhere. But she always said to herself from the first that no man could ever be the same to her as Richard Hickson. She met him first at Lady Atterbury's, when she was first out—a gallant, brown sailor, a little older than herself, and, as she told him afterwards, she fell in love with him there and then. He had been a mite of a midshipman in the *Shannon*, and he had done his part in the awful day of Algiers. He was so modest, so brave, and so intelligent, that most people liked him: she loved him, and told the Princess so. Isabel said that he had not got any money, and so she could not marry him. The Prince, on the other hand, said that he was a young officer of distinction in the greatest navy in the world, and she might do worse. When the fact came to be acknowledged between the Prince and Princess, that she was not likely (with her brother round her neck) to do better, Captain Hickson's visits were somewhat

encouraged, to her great pleasure. When we say that Captain Hickson's visits were somewhat encouraged, we go possibly a little too far: they could not possibly, in one sense, have been encouraged in any way, as his ship was at the Cape of Good Hope, and he was in her, and communication was difficult. Helen Murdoch was quietly informed by the Prince and Princess that Captain Hickson was possessed of every Christian virtue, was rising in the service, that his ship was ordered to beat up the west coast of Africa in coming home, and that if he escaped the fever she might do worse. She was perfectly contented. She thought him far too clever to catch the fever.

He did, however. He had a roving commission to call at Bonny, Brass, Whydah, Cape Coast, and Sierra Leone. He was of a scientific turn, however, and he had read "Pigafetta" and "Andrew Battel." Somehow his wilful ship carried him to St. Thomas, and then—without his consent, of course—carried him to the Gaboon, right along the Equator. Making the long white sand, he naturally was determined to catch a gorilla alive, and place it in the Tower. The gorillas were from home; but, fortunately for Captain Hickson, while the gorillas were behaving in a decent manner—only fixing themselves on an elephant's nose till he went mad, or boxing a lion's ears until the lion was sick of the one-sided game—the human counterparts of the gorilla were extremely active. Between the Bight of Biafra and Whydah, Captain Hickson captured five slavers, which he took to Cape Coast. At that time such a feat was as good at the Admiralty as taking five French frigates had been shortly before; so when he went to Parliament Street he was received with open arms. He went to the Admiralty in a fright, under the impression that he would be attacked with strong language on the subject of taking his ship to the Gaboon, where he had no business, and that his 2,300 slaves would weigh as nothing in the balance against that fact. He mildly mentioned his expedition with his first lieutenant after the gorillas, and excused it on scientific grounds. When he discovered that the Under Secretary thought that the gorilla was an anti-scorbutic fruit, only to be found on the Gaboon, and that Captain Hickson at the risk of his own life had gone there to get it for a scurvy-stricken crew, why then Captain Hickson held his tongue. The Secretary was uncertain about the amount of prize-money, but that would be considerable. Captain Hickson's eminent services brought with them their own retribution. His (the Under Secretary's) services had *their* retribution in constant work. Captain Hickson's services were so great that his Majesty could not allow him to waste his valuable time on shore. He was appointed to

the *Blonde* frigate, now first commissioned. It would be idle for the Secretary to pretend that the Government were not partially influenced by political motives in this appointment. Sir James Hickson's services to the Government were so eminent, that the least recognition they could make was to give a ship to his nephew.

"And where is the *Blonde* to go, sir?" said the delighted captain.

"She will go to the West Coast first, and then round to Celebes Timor and Sydney."

"My old uncle is sharp," said Captain Hickson; "but I will bother him."

"I don't see what you mean," said the Secretary.

"Why, I am the next baronet, don't you see? He wants to get rid of me, the last in entail, so that my cousin, who is illegitimate, may come into the estates under his will."

"Not another word, my dear sir," said the Secretary. "I see it. We have done all we can, and he can't grumble. The *Blonde* shall not go to the West Coast. We don't want to lose all our good officers."

Captain Hickson went out into Parliament Street a glad man. He was to have the most beautiful frigate in the world, and with his name he could ship her crew ten times over. If she was one half what had been said about her, he would do anything with her. Like her predecessor, the French *Blonde*, she would go within five points of the wind. By the lord! it was a splendid chance for a man.

At this point a young gentleman, heated with running, touched him on the arm.

"Captain Hickson?"

"Yes."

"Note from the Secretary;" and so he departed.

"Dear Hickson"—the note ran—"the *Blonde* will not be ready for three months. She will then go on the North American station for one year."

What a prize for a sailor without any interest, save that of an uncle who wished him drowned, and who would gladly have drowned six hundred men with him, so long as he could have put his puny cousin in his place. One thing only was wanting; the woman he loved best in the world could not share his honours with him. Nearly all great things are done for the applause of some loved woman. Captain Hickson loved only one woman in the world, and on this, the most triumphant day of his life, he missed *her*.

He went home to his lodgings, and there was a letter on his table. He tore it open.

“You have been two days in England, and we have heard nothing of you. Nothing, I say. Well; we heard that you were dead with fever, and that it was only by a sudden accession of intelligence on the part of your coxswain that you were not buried alive. To-day, at dinner, we have soup *à la Palestine*, craw-fish, entrées, veal, and many other nice things, including a *Blonde* (who is not to be eaten, but looked at). If you can digest human food, after your experiences among the cannibals in Africa, come to dinner to-day, and come early.—Yours ever,

“D’AMANDVILLIERS.”

Sailors are quick in love matters, far quicker than landmen. Their time, you see, is so very short. Like a Conservative Ministry in these days, they have to make the most of it. Captain Hickson went to dinner with the D’Amandvillierses, but went an hour before the time. Of course he did not do so on purpose; of course the Princess was out driving, and the Prince at his club; of course there was no one in the drawing-room but that imperial beauty, Helen; of course the crisis in both their lives took place.

Not half an hour had passed before it was all over. She told him the truth, that she had never loved any man but him, but that she would have married others; “and from that I am saved.” Then she told him about her brother. The sailor said that there were scoundrels in all families, and dismissed the subject as unworthy of regard. He told her that he was appointed to the *Blonde*, and must sail in three months; that he could not give up his ship, as if he did, he was not sure of another. Ships were not easy to obtain under the present reductions. They were married in a month, and he sailed in three, leaving her with the Prince and Princess. He was seven months away.

Out there beyond the Scillys it is not so easy to get your pilot on board when your ship is at all lively. The *Blonde* was lashing in close-hauled before a N.E. wind, when she sighted a pilot-boat making towards her. The pilot was got on board by the skin of his teeth, and the merry little craft danced away to leeward. The pilot, approaching the captain, said, after saluting the quarter-deck—

“I seen your good lady last night, sir.”

“Yes. Where?”

“At Plymouth. And I see the baby too.”

“Yes.”

“The loveliest little girl ever eyes looked on. Both well.”

“Here are my watch and chain for you, pilot. They cost sixty guineas between them, and the watch is as good as any chronometer. Shall we make a short leg towards the parson and clerk, or keep her as she is?”

“As she is, sir,” said the pilot, putting on the watch and chain; “she’ll do very well. I thank you, sir, a thousand times.”

“Then, if you will take charge for a time, I will go to my cabin, for I have a thankful word or so to say to God Almighty.”

So Captain Hickson was in charge of the *Blonde*; Helen, his wife, was in charge of him; and the young lady just born was kind enough to take charge of both of them, and manage them both, which she did perfectly. As Lady Snizort said to Reginald once, “That child was born to command us all,” to which Reginald agreed; but her ladyship added something in a lower tone about a minx, which Reginald pretended not to hear.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFIDENCE BETWEEN COMRADES.

OUR General walked into the United Service Club one day about this time, and there he met General H——, who had just returned from Vienna. They dined together, and, as old comrades, had a vast deal of conversation by no means interesting to the reader, and some which was.

“And now,” said General H——, “tell us about the Great Family. Is there anything new about them?”

“They are in a general state of prosperity. Everything is going so well with them that they *must* have an accident soon. Even Reginald Hetherage is rich.”

“Is it true that his son is dead?”

“Yes; and has left a son.”

“That is rather a pity, is it not? It will complicate matters in the great lawsuit.”

“The great lawsuit will never be ended, and the family have given up caring about it.”

“Then you are not going to act.”

“Why should I? and what could I do if I did?”

“But do you mean to say that you are going to keep up this absurd farce any longer?”

“What absurd farce?”

“Why, having an entirely unnecessary concealment, and a whole lot of nonsense talked about it.”

“Who talks?”

“No one; but they would if they knew it. I have never opened my mouth. I only know what you told me at Vittoria.”

“There was nothing very much in that,” said our General. “I only said that a certain secret was entrusted to me under a certain condition, and that I intended to keep it.”

“Is what you are doing moral?”

“I think so. I am told in the handwriting of a certain man, to whom I owe everything in the world, not to enter a certain room except under certain contingencies. What there is in that room I have no idea, absolutely none—at least, really none. I do not see that I am doing wrong. I will show you the paper if you like.”

“Well, do.”

General H—— read it: “‘At your own discretion.’ Hey! well, that is curious. ‘Ruin of your own peace of mind for ever!’ Good heavens, Arthur! ‘A crime not forgiveable by Divine mercy’—that is—that is very strange. ‘No pecuniary benefit to yourself.’—Heavens! I should hope not. ‘In case of your marriage, open the room and burn every paper except the one which it would be felony to burn.’ But you were married, Arthur, and did not do that.”

“I had not the heart.”

“Do you mean to say that you have been about the world all these years, Arthur, with this secret on your heart?”

“Yes. Can you begin to understand why I have not opened that room?”

“Arthur, do you think it affects your family honour?”

“I do not know. I have no family.”

“But who were your father and mother?”

“My father—well, I know who my father was, but who my mother was I have not the wildest idea.”

“Whew! You don’t say so. Suppose that this paper was some document putting you in possession of a vast sum of money?”

“You see it cannot be; he says distinctly, ‘No pecuniary advantage.’”

“Well, why not burn the house down?”

“I don’t think that would do.”

“Then you dare not go in?”

“That is it.”

“What relation are you to all this crowd of Simpsons, Murdochs, and Talbots?”

“None at all. They do not know me.”

“H'm! And yet you always speak of them as ‘the family.’ You will not tell me the whole truth.”

“Well, I will then.”

The General whispered a few words to General H——, who grew extremely grave, and sat very silent for some time. At last he said—

“You have given me your confidence, alone of all men in the world. I can understand your motives, but I think that you are not acting rightly. You are the very last man I should have supposed to have yielded to such a crochet, which, mark me, if indulged in will grow into a craze, and will produce incalculable misery to yourself and others. You are not acting with justice, and will most assuredly live to regret it.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEGINNING OF TWO LONG FRIENDSHIPS.

CHARLES'S widow and child got on extremely well, and were as happy as they were likely to be in the establishment of Aunt Hester. That is to say, that they had everything which the world could give them in the way of eating and drinking, combined with every possible kindness and consideration. Every wish they could form was anticipated, until at last Mrs. Hetherage began to feel the surfeits of prosperity, and when she was low in her mind rather missed the old excitement of debt.

There was no change in the house, and hers was not a mind in any way formed for regularity. In her happy-go-lucky (we might rather say unlucky) life with Charles she had rather enjoyed herself than otherwise. She had always felt the glorious uncertainties of a campaign, on the losing side, certainly, but which was not without its pleasurable excitement. She had often, in the old times, when the presence of Charles was alone enough to make her happy, known the want of five shillings; and when Reginald, or more seldom Charles, had brought her home a pound or so, she

had clutched the money with a glad little cry, dear to both of them, and had committed some pretty, trivial extravagance, dearer still. Now she had as much money as she wanted, but she had nothing on earth to do with it, which was extremely provoking.

She wanted, for instance, on one occasion a particular garment for George, as a birthday present—some kind of cloak of an expensive material, trimmed with swansdown. She had twenty guineas which Reginald had given her, and she intended to buy it. When Hester asked her where she would like to be driven that afternoon, she mildly suggested Rhinds in Sloane Street. Hester, sitting beside her, gave the word of command to her coachman as if she was ordering a squadron of cavalry to capture guns. To Rhinds they went, *ventre à terre*, the cloak was bought, and she brought out the money. But Aunt Hester would not let her pay for it, and she put her poor little guineas back. Hester meant nothing but kindness, but she had spoilt the poor woman's afternoon, and made her feel her dependence. She was so distraught going home that Hester said that she must be ill, and made her take port wine, a thing she hated, and which spoilt her dinner, a thing she loved.

The hours at Hester Simpson's were extremely objectionable to her. She had never kept them, certainly, except by fits and starts, and though not a word was ever said on the subject, yet she knew that her unpunctuality was inconvenient. When she chose to be unwell she could keep her rooms, and gain a certain amount of independence that way; but she hated shamming ill, and being made a prisoner of. Very green freshmen sham *ager*, and get off lectures, but they generally find that the escape from chapel and lecture is hardly bought by being confined to college. Mary liked to go out walking very early in the morning, and if she did this she was of course supposed to be well. So Hester would wait prayers for her to any hour, which was specially objectionable. For if Mary had a pet objection in this world, it was that of family prayer, as conducted by Aunt Hester. She was a religious woman, a clergyman's daughter and widow, and upholder, even to fierceness, of everything connected with the Thirty-nine Articles; but she could not stand Hester's way of reading prayers. Her emphasis, she used to say to Reginald in certain precious little confidences, of which we shall see more presently, was always wrong. She always, according to Mary, read *at* her congregation. She managed by her way of reading to turn the meaning of the parables upside down. When she read about the Pharisee and the publican, she read it as if she were the only just person in the world, and the servants were nothing

better than a set of broken-down licensed victuallers. All the servants thought the publicans of the Scripture kept inns, and that when Hester had done with the extortioners, unjust, &c., and said, "even as this publican," she meant the butler, who had once kept a public-house; and insinuated that, bad as they all were, he was the worst of the lot. Aunt Hester got a hint about this piece of mistranslation from Reginald. She was then at trouble to explain to the servants that the publicans of holy writ were tax-gatherers for the Romans. The servants, considering that there was no appeal from their mistress as a literary lady, concluded that the publicans combined licensed victualling and Romish practices with the still more objectionable practice of putting executions into poor people's houses, and that the Pharisees were an estimable body of gentlemen who denounced their evil doings, and so they were just as much edified as before.

Reginald was writing a great deal now, but in a desultory way, leaving the great subject of which he was master to take care of itself for a time, and trying for his own purposes to make a mark in other fields. For example, he wrote a great article in a leading quarterly on Æschines. It was grand, and not a single fault could be found with it, except that there was not an original thought in it from beginning to end. It was merely a *précis* of known books on the subject, put together in a masterly way. The very accents in the Greek quotations were done by a tipsy, broken-down scholar, whom he had known in his adversity; but the thing took, and made him a great reputation. He had written a hundred finer things, with the bailiff's at his son's door, against time: but he was rich now, and so his article was successful—so successful that the other great review had an article on Æschines, in which they proved that Reginald, with all his vast scholarship, was a fool. Reginald's publishers asked him to reply in a pamphlet, but he said what was the exact truth, "that he had only crammed the thing up, and had now forgotten all about it. On looking at it for the second time, he thought that it was great nonsense, and that the other man evidently knew more about the subject than he did."

The other party got up, from an eminent hand, a great article on the Draconic laws. This Reginald picked to pieces most thoroughly and ably, but with a ferocity and power of personal abuse with which no one had ever credited him. Asked for an explanation by Goodge, he merely said that he wanted to see if he could make a literary blackguard of himself, and that he had succeeded beyond his hopes.

A few years went on, and there was no change. Reginald was

nearly all day at his office, and half the night at his stand-up desk in his room. To this desk, every night, used to come Mary, and discuss the botherations of the day with him. They were both discontented, and would have been glad enough to get away and be free. Neither of them, however, dared to mention the matter. Had it not been for their private confidences they would both have run away and set up for themselves. The greatest statesmen and historians seem to agree that the best way to promote revolution is to deny private discussion. As in the State, so in the household; how many estimable women, who have gained the position of being "mistresses in their own house," dream they are walking every day on the edge of a volcano? that when a woman can say, "My word is law," she forgets that the end of Cæsarism is revolution on the first opportunity.

Aunt Hester was at first saved from sheer revolution by no merit of her own. Her anger against Reginald and Mary was great, because she knew that they "collogued," and that she was not in their confidence. It was because she could not prevent their colloguing that they did not rebel.

For five years or more this devoted woman tried to tame these two rather radical souls into her own way of thinking. The child, on whom she had set her brave old heart, was growing up, and she could see that the child did not love her as he did the two others. It was a bitter grief to her at first, and she was angry, because no human being could possibly deny that Reginald and Mary were under great obligations to her. She was, however, a woman among a thousand, and she thought it out for herself.

She was a genius also. We have never denied her that great quality. However her novels may have been ridiculed by Reginald, she was always spoken of with some respect by him; and she could think, and act after she had thought.

"What," she began thinking, "was her best novel, according to the best critics, and the men who were far above all critics—the men of the world? Why, Camilla! What did Camilla do! She tried to form a man, in most respects her superior, on her own model, and to bring him and his senses into subjection to her own petty ways of life. Was she not doing the same thing with Reginald and Mary? Yes. Did Camilla fail? No; she yielded, and so at the last moment saved failure. She would do the same. It was hard at her age to yield, and to yield to those who were certainly under obligations to her, but she would swallow her pride. She could no longer bear the bitterness of seeing that the

child looked on her as a bugbear, and that the constant and continuous kindness of Reginald and Mary was an effort, always studiously concealed, but still obvious to her sharp sense. She would have probably thirty years more in this world, and, God help her ! she had not made an intimate friend, even of the gentle Reginald."

We have said before that there had been no rebellion. Natures unfixed, and possibly shifty in their honourable cowardice, like those of Reginald and Mary, must be pushed very hard before they rebel openly. They could ease their minds, one to another, and be theoretically seditious (the government which stops theoretical sedition is idiotic), but they never reduced their sedition to practice. Had they done so, theirs would have been an easy but ignoble victory. The perverse old woman's heart was always warm to them, and she would have yielded at once : she yielded in the end without violence.

Reginald and Mary never attributed her yielding to the right cause until they knew her better. They always thought that their tacit and confidential opposition to her and her ways was unnoticed by her. She had yielded long before they had dreamt of it. She would have spoken to them and taken them into her confidence long before the opportunity came. Circumstances created an opportunity, however, and she seized on it.

Reginald was at his desk one night, and Mary was sitting in her dressing-gown on a stool at his feet. They had been "colloguing" about Aunt Hester, when she came suddenly in. If they thought that she did not see their guilty start, they were mistaken. They both cried out at once in unfeigned astonishment—

"Aunt Hester !"

She sank into a chair, and burst into tears. It was such an unusual thing for her that they were both alarmed. Reginald said—

"Good heavens, Hester ! what is the matter ?"

"My heart is broken," she said.

Reginald had heard of that accident happening to her on several previous occasions, consequently he was not greatly alarmed. Mary, however, was rather terrified, for she had been passing observations on Aunt Hester, immediately before, which were not wholly complimentary, and so she felt guilty. Reginald coolly said—

"I suppose it is James again, Hester ?"

"It is all over," said Aunt Hester. "Knowing as little as we do about the origin of things, one is rather disposed to ask with

some impatience, who invented boys? They are an inconceivable mistake. I never knew any good come of them."

"We were all boys once, Hester," said Reginald.

"I can lay my head on my pillow and swear that I never was," said Aunt Hester.

"I am not speaking of you. I merely said that I was a boy once."

"And a nice mess you made of it," said Aunt Hester. "If you could have waited two days to be born, my poor saint James would never have been thrown into all these temptations, and we should all have been happy."

Reginald did not see his way to this logic, and merely asked—

"What has he been doing now?"

"Forging my name, Reginald. What am I to do now?"

"Pay the money, I suppose. Is this the first time?"

"Why, there you have me, Reginald. It is *not*. I have been very weak about it, and have managed to put matters square. But this time I cannot. The people who hold his bill have written to me to say that they have discovered it to be a forgery; that he is in league with George Simpson, and that the payment of the money will not avail, for that I have lent myself to his swindles two or three times before, by taking up paper which I knew I had not signed. They want me to prosecute James, and say that I am lending myself to his disreputable courses. Reginald and Mary, we have not been so happy together as we might have been; that is all past, and it was my fault. Try to love me, you two, and above all things give me your advice."

Mary's arm was round her waist and her head was on her breast in a moment.

"Father Reginald," she said, "shall advise you."

Reginald was walking up and down the room in thought. It was a few minutes before he spoke.

"Hester," he said at last, "I have been deeply wrong. I have not done my duty by you. You have been a kind and tender friend to me and this lass here, but your ways have not fitted ours, and we have been too unyielding. You have asked our confidence and our love: the latter you have always had. Now you shall have the former for ever. Advice—well. Come and kiss me, Hester."

With two little sobs she did so.

"Reginald," she said, "I am an old woman, and am very penitent."

"You an old woman?" said Reginald. "Humbug! Penitent? What the deuce have you got to be penitent about? We

must see to this matter though. When will Goodge be in town?"

"Next week."

"Bother! Now we are all so happy together I should have liked a conversation about the education of our boy. But about this matter, I must consult some one else. I should fancy that you could get off this time by paying the money, but I don't know. Now that we are in such happy confidence, Hester, I would walk barefoot to save you one hour's annoyance. To think that I have been such a brute to you, Hester——"

"Yes, Reginald, I am so newly happy because this last misfortune has brought us three together, that I am confused in my thoughts. Guide me."

"Guide you, you silly woman? Why I am just going to ask you to guide me. Goodge is away, and we must have a friend in council. I know no one except members of the family, who had better know nothing about the matter. Have you a friend you can trust? Nay, don't blush, because I *know* you have. You have a friend of whom I know nothing—Arthur."

"Well, leave Arthur alone. He has been particularly anxious not to be known to you. He has never met you, and that is his business. Would you mind going to General Anders to-morrow morning for me?"

"In the first place, I don't think he is at all your man, and in the second he is Governor of Sierra Leone."

"Might there not be two General Anders?" said Aunt Hester.

It flashed across Reginald that there *were* two, and that this might be the one he had been forbidden to inquire after years before.

"Of course there might be two," he said. "My General Anders is at Sierra Leone; where is yours?"

"At No. 1, Bolton Row," said Aunt Hester.

"Well, I will go," said Reginald. "It is rather an awkward matter to approach a total stranger with." And he added, internally, "The murderous young scoundrel, that I should take pains for him! What would she say if she knew that he had tried to poison me?"

"Well, you go," said Aunt Hester, "and he will see everything right for us, if mortal man can accomplish it. I have laid a trap for you and for him, Reginald. Good men should know one another."

"At No. 1, Bolton Row!" thought Reginald. "How very strange!"

For Reginald knew that it was the house of the old merchant

Digby—the house at which all the original mischief was concocted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MYSTERY ABOUT COX AND GREENWOOD IS SOLVED.

REGINALD, leaving word at his office that he would not be there before one, walked across the Green Park to Bolton Row, and asked for General Anders. He was informed by a very smart footman that General Anders was not down, but that the Duchess de St. Privat was. Should he take up his name?

Reginald sent up his card, and was shown into the dining-room. Who on *earth* was the Duchess de St. Privat, and what was *she* doing in the old house of Digby, the merchant—the house which ought to be his grandson's some day, surely?

He looked round with eager curiosity. Certainly it was a very splendid room—old, slightly gloomy, but immensely rich. At one end of the room was a triptych by Memling of the resurrection; which a document underneath, after giving the description of the picture, said was acquired by the late Thomas Digby from the Duc de Penthièvre in exchange for a Gainsborough. It might be worth, he thought, as a tolerable judge, about six thousand pounds. He had no time to appraise anything further, for he was requested to walk upstairs to the presence of the Duchess. Reginald, on whom a Duchess would produce about the same effect as a chimney-sweep, walked up into her presence.

The drawing-room beat the dining-room in beauty and richness, but everything was very old, and no vandalisms had been committed by the beautiful hand which was held out to him, or had been conceived in the grand head which bowed to him.

He thought her very beautiful, for her age, and wondered very much how she seemed to be so much at home among the dead merchant's furniture. It was evidently, from its date, *the* furniture. It had been given away by the old man, he remembered, to obscure people; and here was a Parisianly dressed Duchess, in very deep mourning, apparently in full possession of it!

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Hetherage," said the Duchess. "The General is down very late to-day, but he did not expect you so soon. I know that he had a letter warning him of your visit this morning. I will go and see after him."

Reginald bowed and said something, but was absent. This was the room where the old man must have seen his relatives for the last time, fifty odd years ago, almost on the day when he, Reginald, was born. What was *he* like? and what was his grandfather; and what were Talbot, Simpson, and Murdoch like? They would have sat round the hearthrug; yes, and the old man would have sat in that corner by the fire. The whole scene came before him, even the pig-tails, silk stockings, and breeches of the men. He was getting perfectly certain that Murdoch, for instance, was dressed in a mulberry-coloured coat, had sausage knees, and was generally a humbug, when he was startled by a hand upon his shoulder, and a charming voice behind him, which said—"Well, cousin, how are you?"

He started, and turned, facing a very beautiful woman leading an equally beautiful little girl about five years old. He could only ejaculate—

"Cousin! You have the advantage of me."

"Have I now, Reginald? Well, you do wisely to forget our old love-making, for I am married now, and steadier; yet what tender kisses we used to interchange, dear me! I loved you more passionately than I ever loved a man before. I used to watch for your footsteps, and weep bitterly when you did not come. Now you have forgotten me."

"Why," said Reginald, radiantly, "it is never my old sweetheart?"

"Oh dear no, Cousin Reginald, it is not Helen Murdoch, the little orphan whom you were so kind to—oh dear no! Come give me a kiss for old times—ha! Do you remember how you used to take me from school, and how solemn the Duchess used to be with you?"

"What Duchess?"

"The Duchess of St. Privat, who has just left the room. Do you mean to say that you did not recognise Miss Mortimer? She has adopted me."

"I understood that you were adopted by the Prince of Almond-water, or some such person."

"We *were* the Prince of Amandvilliers, but our papa is dead, and we are the Duc de St. Privat. We have got about 150,000 francs a year, and we are in Lorraine burying our papa and taking possession. For myself, Cousin Reginald, I am married to a sailor—one of the best men in the world."

"How strange that we should meet here!" said Reginald. "Tell me, while we are alone together, my old friend, who is General Anders. Does he live here?"

“Yes, when he is in England he always lives with the Duke and Duchess. They were enemies in war, and actually fought hand to hand; but in some bloody battle our General saved his life, and they are more than brothers.”

“What is General Anders like?”

“Hush! here he is.”

There was a presence in the room which Reginald felt almost before he saw the man himself. He had come in very silently, and was standing before Reginald as he turned, looking very curiously at him.

He must have been nearly sixty, though his lean, shaven cheeks showed no wrinkle of age—his greyish, curled moustache only told of that. The face was squarely built, and the features were singularly good. What his mouth was like it was impossible to say, seeing that no one, himself included, had ever seen it since he was nineteen, but as one might judge from the shape of the moustache, it was accustomed to a slight smile, which elevated the corners of the upper lip. In physique he was upright and imposing, and his well-cut clothes showed off his figure as well as any clothes could in that hideous period of transition. He was a shapely, magnificent-looking man; but one thing attracted you more than his carriage—his eyes, large, grey and with very little mobility, were the part of his face which struck you most. To describe them is impossible; to write down their expression is not only possible, but easy—they expressed a gentle and kindly curiosity. There was a something more lurking in the face somewhere—possibly about the eyebrows. Was it an expression, or the latent power of an expression? and of what? Not of painful horror? Surely not. Yet—

“I have very great pleasure in meeting you, Mr. Hetherage,” he said, “though I wish that it was on a more agreeable business. Now, my dear Mrs. Hickson, I want Mr. Hetherage all to myself.”

“It seems to me that you want most things to yourself,” said the child Emily, speaking for the first time. “The instant that an agreeable person enters this house I am always sent out of the room. If there is one thing I like more than another it is society, and I never get any but that of a parcel of children.”

“Come again as soon as you can, Reginald,” said Mrs. Hickson, laughing. “Kiss Cousin Reginald, Emily. He was kind to me when very few were; but for the matter of that, he was always kind to every one.”

The beautiful little girl was held up to kiss him, and condescended to do so, evidently to her mother’s relief. And the

mother whispered in his ear, "Spare my brother;" then they were gone, and he was alone with General Anders.

Neither spoke for a short time, they were looking at one another.

"We have never met before," said the General at last.

"No; but I think that I am not wrong in saying that I am under deep obligations to you."

"That was the payment of an old debt; I am deeply to blame that I did not continue my advances, most deeply. But the fact is, that I feared they were doing no good to your son, and that any help I gave you was frittered away on his selfish extravagance. Forgive me if I speak rudely; I only speak the truth to clear myself, in your eyes, for what must appear to you selfish harshness."

"It never appeared to me as anything of the kind. With my son I sowed folly, and I reaped it. But he was the dearest friend I ever had, and the best of men. With my grandson I intend to do differently, so I suppose that he will hate me. I only give you my hearty thanks for what you did. Now, you have used a phrase which you have used before, through Cox and Greenwood; you talk about some old debt. What was it, and when was it incurred?"

"It was incurred by your grandfather, long ago."

"I cannot understand it," said Reginald.

"Walk into the next room with me," said the General. "Now, look at this picture."

It was a picture to look at fifty times: it was by Gainsborough. An old man, seated at the other side of a table, stared you in the face, so that you felt a slight nervous movement in the muscles at the back of your neck and head, as you do when you are attacked, either verbally or physically, by another man—the feeling of defiance and anger, which causes the cobra to swell his neck and raise his head before striking. He was sitting, as we said, on the other side of a table, he had his arms folded closely, and on the table before him there was money. The hair was grey and close cropped, and the complexion was of a burning brickdust, but not unhealthy. The eyebrows were whiter than the hair, and beneath them were a pair of scowling eyes, rather close together, but large and intelligent. The face was round and smooth, without fat, and would have made that of a handsome butcher's boy, even when the hair was grey. The mouth was the terrible feature in it—broad, not sensuous, but with a pouting, well-cut under-lip, which told of sardonic defiance, not of secret lust. A picture, which, by the immense and almost unconscious

skill of the artist, gave you the face of the man himself: that of one set in furious hatred against the world.

“Do you know who that is?” said the General.

“A man who has suffered great wrong, or who has inflicted it,” said Reginald, “and who is defying the world. I would tame that fellow, General,” he continued with animation; “I’d tame that fellow with kindness.”

“Why?”

“Why? You have not studied so many fine portraits as I have. Those eyes are capable of tears, my soldier, and those bitter set lips have kissed a child.”

“God knows they have,” said the General, quietly, “for they have often kissed mine.”

Reginald turned to him. He was only stroking his grey moustache and looking at the picture.

“Who is the man, General?”

“My father.”

“I beg your pardon for anything I have said,” replied Reginald. “He was——”

“Digby, the merchant.”

“Good heavens!”

“Yes, and the Duchess is my half-sister. Come into the other room now. The affair of James Murdoch can be settled at once if Aunt Hester pays the money by instalments to me. Now, come and sit down, and I will give you a true account of myself. Trouble yourself no more about James Murdoch in any way. Tell Hester that I have got the paper in my capacity as Director of the Behrat Mining Company, and that I am answerable.”

“Good,” said Reginald. “I did not know that you went in for finance.”

“Yes, very heavily. I have my father’s blood in my veins, and I have nothing to do now.”

“Would you repeat what you said in the next room,” said Reginald, “for I am completely stunned?”

“Well, I am the son of old Digby, the merchant. Do you remember your grandfather?”

“Well.”

“Did he ever describe the scene which took place in this room before his death?”

“Often.”

“Did he ever tell you of a boy who came in and sat on his knee.”

“Yes, often.”

"I am that boy. Your grandfather offered me his assistance when he thought I should want it, and I never forgot it. I have only paid part of my debt to you; I hope the time may come when I shall pay the rest in some form."

"May it long be distant!" said Reginald.

"I am in some sort saving you indirectly from annoyance now," said General Anders; "for I need not tell you that I am paying this money for that arch-rascal, James Murdoch."

"I know it."

"He dare not appear in England again with this forgery hanging over his head. We are well quit of him—he is off to America, where he must perforce stay."

"Is he in poverty?"

"No; make your mind easy on that score. I believe that he is thriving. Hester, of course, would not prosecute him; and if she did, he would only be out of our way for a few years. As it is, he is out of our way for ever, without any public scandal."

"But we none of us ever knew anything about you," said Reginald. "You dropped out of all human knowledge."

"It was my wish to do so. I was left to the care of that old couple, the Dickers; I had known no other friend except my father, and they had no child save me. I took the name which they gave me; they fulfilled their trust as regards me, and I repaid them with affection and diligence. I got into the Artillery without much difficulty, and having no interest, I made it by my own hand. I never wanted money; I never wanted employment; I made friends for myself, and made myself necessary to them; I married well, as far as money is concerned, and I am rich. Three people only know who I am—Hester, Goodge, and yourself—unless I except my sister Isabel. I have the most particular reasons for begging you to keep my counsel."

"There will be no difficulty about it, my dear General. Do you know anything about a very old friend of mine, another General Anders?"

"Yes. Curiously enough, I am connected with him in business."

"I mistook him for you once."

"Curious. He is not a man very likely to have been sentimental in a case like yours. He is a sharp man of business, but, like the rest of us, has the chance of dying rich."

"I am very glad to hear it. He used to be very poor."

"Yes; but I throw, for him, a great deal in his way. He is rather *too* shrewd, and not bold enough. Yet I should say that, even with what I have put in his way, he will die worth his

hundred thousand pounds or so ; I should say not less, possibly more. It stands to reason that he will, in his five years' governorship, find out all we want to know, and sell his information. Whether we shall throw very much money in that direction or not I can't say ; I am for putting half a million in those quarters, but others say no. Still, Anders is safe for the sum I have named."

"Then you——"

"Well, it is hard to say what I do not do," said the General. "I have made more than half a million in a few years ; I have nothing else to do. It is very easy. My father did not give me much money, and left me none. But he left me the history of his life, which is worth four or five millions to any man out of Bedlam. If you ever are fool enough to want to make your fortune, I shall be most happy to do it for you. I don't want money, but '*il faut s'amuser,*' and I make it. Well, good-bye, now ; I must away to the Commander-in-Chief. Let us see much of one another. Army matters and money are not everything, and I know not so very many pleasant faces in the world as to refuse to make another familiar to me."

CHAPTER XXV.

REGINALD AND THE GENERAL TAKE TO FLYING KITES.

DID you ever have occasion to be called away from your favourite garden in April, and come back to it in the middle of June ? The difference is so great that it is scarcely recognisable.

"Crescit occulto velut arbor ævo."

The lily which you left a few green leaves is a tall spike of incomparable flowers ; the standard rose, which was no more lovely than a broom with its handle in the ground, is now a mass of beauty and fragrance ; and the earth, which was all bare mould, now is covered and hidden with objects so rare and lovely, that all the jewels of the world cannot compare with them. A miracle in short has been performed in your absence, and it is your absence only which makes it startling. Had you been there and watched the development going on under your eyes, the miracle

would have happened all the same, and yet you would scarcely have wondered.

The garden, of which Reginald is our favourite flower, flourished out in such an astonishing manner the next seven years, that if we did what we could perfectly well do without injuring this narrative—that is to say, skip those seven years altogether, and go on at the end of them—you would find things so changed that you would accuse us of improbability. Changed we say? Why, no; probably “developed” would be a better word, because the flowers, all which we are to see in full bloom directly, were good strong plants when we left them just now. Nevertheless, you would scarcely know at least one of them, and so a few words must be said in explanation of the altered circumstances among which we shall find our friends.

Reginald’s theoretical talent for finance has been previously more than once mentioned; it has been also mentioned that on more than one occasion he had determined to confine himself strictly to theory, and he would probably have kept to that resolution altogether, had it not been for the close intimacy and friendship which now arose between himself and General Anders, and which continued unabated through everything which followed.

Knowing, as we now do, who the General was, it is easy to see in his speculative career a mere case of transmitted hereditary genius. Many, very many, military officers take to—we will not say speculation, but to operations with money, after their occupation is gone, from sheer want of some daily business; and they show, as a general rule, neither more nor less ability than any one else. Now, there is no doubt that the best men of business who were thrown against General Anders perceived at once that the brilliant and successful soldier was a still more brilliant and successful operator in the money market. Had they known who he was, they would, doubtless, not have wondered at his abilities, but only would have been surprised at such a gentle creature being the son of such a hard, griping old termagant as Digby. In fact, General Anders had only inherited two qualities from that gentleman—powers of calculation and secretiveness. He very soon, in short, became one of the best known and “luckiest” men of his day.

It was impossible for Reginald to be in continual communication and close consultation with General Anders without, practically, being drawn into his operations. When he actually began for himself, when the first egg was laid which was to produce the peacock, when the grain of mustard seed was sown which was to grow into such a great tree, we know not.

Whether he began with a loan from General Anders, or whether he, like so many other wealthy men, began with nothing at all, or whether, like Sir Richard Whittington, he began with a cat, it is impossible to say. The probability is that he raised some money on his life; but speculation is idle, for he never told any one.

Leaving the realms of speculation, we come to those of fact. His wealth increased as fast as that of the lucky farmer who got his landlord to give him one grain of wheat next market day, and double it every day for two years; in four years he was worth a tolerable sum of money, in six years he had doubled it, in seven years he was an extremely wealthy man. His rise was nearly as great in proportion as that of the mighty linen-draper of York, which took place nearly at the same time, though neither the General nor Reginald confined themselves exclusively to railways. The General, in fact, by far the largest capitalist, put considerable sums of money into other things when, during the railway mania, they were at their lowest; and then sold out at a great advance afterwards; at which time it was a great convenience to him.

Reginald's house in Berkeley Square was not his own: he had hired its furniture, pictures, and everything from the Duke of Murcia's assignees. As that gentleman's affairs were so curiously involved in different parts of the world, that the settlement of them would probably occur about the time when the Digby will was settled, Reginald considered that he was practically in permanent occupation, the more so as he was one of the great Duke's creditors. He had, some time previous to this, turned his back with mingled feelings of regret and relief on his old office, which he had held so long, and where he had undergone so much. The old hall-porter cried when he went away, and refused to be comforted; and when the doors swung behind Reginald, they closed on him for the last time, for he never had the heart to go near the place any more. When he went away he forgot a favourite plant, and the messenger brought it to him next day. "It is the first old friend I have forgotten in my prosperity," said Reginald sadly, "and it shall be the last."

Always both the General and he had one rule from which they never departed. They realised in land. No land was ever in the market, but what either one or the other of them was after it. Their operations in this way were very considerable, so considerable that men high up in the city were surprised. With their increasing system of intelligence they had little difficulty in making very large percentages on their money in those days, even before the electric telegraph. People, therefore, were rather

surprised that they should be content with two and a half, which was the outside of what they got on land. They were, however, considered to be safe men, all the safer for proving that they had a stake in the country in the form of land.

There was no partnership between them individually, and yet it was observed that they always, or nearly always, worked together, and always with certain very safe old houses. In any Indian contract you would find the names Talbot, Anders, and Hetherege. Australia was at that early time requiring money (and in pretty handsome sums too) from the mother country; for what is debt (according to some political economists) save a proof of credit, and consequently of civilisation? In all transactions, Imperial or other, you found the names of Murdoch, Hetherege, and Anders. America also required cash, and occasionally Anders, Simpson, and Hetherege would send them some, but always on cotton bonds, or some extremely trustworthy security. The property which the Simpsons held in the United States would have been entire security for the interest on the National Debt, but General Anders and Reginald Hetherege were such extremely cautious people, that they did not send much of their money in that direction. The Simpsons were inclined to be angry at this sometimes, for they had property, of course inalienable, in negroes, which was security enough; but the General and Reginald were unfortunately Abolitionists, and prejudiced. In Spain, in Mexico, in the South American Republics, the names of Anders, Hetherege, Talbot, Murdoch, and Simpson were unknown. The only mistake they committed was in distrusting France. Reginald certainly went heavily in for continental railways, but entirely alone.

We need not say that the "family" and he were perfectly reconciled now. He had brought into the family the great financier General Anders, who, with his originally vast wealth, had put them in the way of doubling their fortunes. That General Anders should become a millionaire was nothing, because he really had £100,000 to start with; but that he should make a rich man of such an extremely slow person as Reginald, showed him to be a financier indeed. Yet the family remembered that, even at the time when Reginald was living with his son, when his son was glad to gain money by taking pupils into his house—when there were executions in that house, and there was not a bed to lie on—at that same time Reginald was writing those masterly financial articles which had helped to reinstate him in his place. General Anders had discovered the great financial genius of Reginald, and had utilised it. What was

more natural? General Anders had the money—Reginald had the genius. They rallied round them with *their* money, and sent out sprats to catch whales. The best of it was, that they caught their whales, and spent part of the money in a style of living in which they, though with a good idea of comfort, had never indulged before.

From the flimsy and absurd speculations which went on in those days both General Anders and Reginald kept aloof. Our readers will remember many of them—the flying machine, and so on. At one time they classed the electric telegraph with the flying machine, and rather laughed at it. They, however, went into railways with most of the money left after investment in land, and they believed in railways so heartily, that it was difficult to make a railway for any long distance without bringing it through some of their land, and having to pay for it. Consequently it follows that land may, in the times which the late Mr. Mills calls “critical,” be made to pay more than two and a half per cent. if it gets into the hands of financiers.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEW GLIMPSE OF REGINALD BY TWO OLD FRIENDS.

Two men were waiting in a crowd in front of the Houses of Parliament, and were touching one another. One was an old man, in the dress of an ecclesiastic of some kind; the other was obviously an English priest of some rather strict sect. The elder man was a little feeble, and when the crowd swayed seemed nervous.

The younger clergyman got hold of the elder one's arm, and said, “Hold on by me, sir; I am younger than you are.”

“I thank you, sir,” said the other. “I am so little used to London that I get nervous about it as I get older. I live in the country, and among books, while you——”

“I am a London clergyman, and do not care for any crowd; hush, my dear sir, there is the news.”

It came roaring towards them like a sea, and they had difficulty in keeping their feet. A great man had resigned.

“I am glad of it,” said the old man, pulling off his hat, and showing to the experienced eye of his companion a priest's tonsure.

The cry was taken up by the dispersing crowd. The two clergymen walked away together.

"I think we should know one another," said the Anglican, "we have met before."

"I do not remember," said the Roman Catholic; "and stay—no, I do not remember."

"We are both some years older," said the Anglican. "I fought you for a soul once."

"Why, yes. Mr. Morley," said Monseigneur Morton. "My dear sir, I am so glad to see you. What strange time for a meeting! Walk with me a little way. Well, and what became of that poor boy? Living among my books, I know nothing of the world save through my newspaper."

"He did no good," said Mr. Morley; "he took to popular preaching, and preached well; but in the end he died without any convictions, I am afraid."

"Died?"

"Yes; he was drowned."

"And his father?"

"His father is alive and well. I shall go and see him soon, and beg of him for my poor. He went through very bitter poverty in consequence of his son's misconduct, but he has had a large accession of wealth. I lost sight of him for a long time. The sight of me was painful to him, and his house was at one time so very disreputable that he disliked any one to come near it. A friend of mine, however—Mr. Goodge—tells me that he bore his poverty very well, and I am curious to see how he bears his riches, which I understand are great."

"I remember hearing about it," said Father Morton; "he had to come into half the National Debt under some lawsuit. So that is settled?"

"No; it is as far from settlement as ever; but he is very rich, and very much sought after. I am told that he is going into Parliament."

"Some one has left him a fortune, then?"

"Why, not that, either. He has made some bank, or found some mine, or something. I know nothing of such things. I only know that he is very rich, and that I am not."

"Let us go and see him together," said the priest. "Let us go now. Where does he live?"

"In Berkeley Square. Come, it is not far."

And so the two good men walked on across the Green Park, and that was slightly out of their way; but the priest wanted, like a countryman, to look at the scaffolding round the arch,

by means of which Waterloo was to be avenged by the present statue.

Having allowed his country companion to stare at the timber-work long enough, Mr. Morley passed on, and naturally came into Bolton Row; at No. 1 the door was open, and two or three carriages were waiting.

"I should like to go in there," said the priest. "I know the man who lives there—the Duc de St. Privat; he, like your friend, has been making a great deal of money. See, who is this coming out? This is surely our man himself."

It was Reginald without doubt, not showing his age at all, but placid, calm, handsome, and mild-looking as ever. The footman attached to a splendid carriage held the door open for him, but he said very quietly, "Thank you, James, I will walk home." And the carriage drove away, leaving him standing in the street.

They went up to him, and he knew them at once. He was deeply affected.

"After so many years!" he said, in a low tone, with their hands in his. "You did all you could to save him—would God he were here now! Say nothing against him, for the greatest light of my life went out when he died. I am rich enough now, but I would live in poverty if I could have him back again. I like to see any one who reminds me of him and of my long and bitter humility. I pray God never to let me forget my lesson, and to grant me strength to avoid pride. Come with me and let us talk about old times."

In the narrow alley behind the Duke of Devonshire's, he walked first to show them the way, and the priest whispered to the parson, "Money will do him no harm."

"No," said the parson; "I think that he will do."

When they were together again, Reginald said, "You come to me singularly well to-day, for I am in anxiety. My boy is down at Chatham, passing his examination, and we are all deeply anxious about the result."

"Your boy?"

"Yes; my grandson, Charles's son. He has had every care, and he seems a fine fellow. I have educated him myself, with the assistance of the best tutors; he has only been away from me for two years at the Naval College. I should like to tell you all about him. Come in to lunch with me. Hark! What is that the man is crying?"

"Have you not heard the news? Lord—— has resigned."

"I thought he would have lasted another month; but as it is,

I must be in the city at once. Can you dine with me at seven? You shall then hear all about my boy, and something about me. Come early; I must run before my horses are taken out. You will come. Yes; then good-bye until seven."

"This is something of an adventure," said Father Morton to Mr. Morley. "Let us follow it up."

"By all means," said the parson. "I wish he would find a mine for me. This dinner shall cost him a hundred pounds for my poor."

"I wonder if he will see his way to my reredos," said Father Morton laughing.

"No, I won't stand that," said Mr. Morley. "I won't have a true churchman's money diverted for Popish practices."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEODORIDES.

OUR two old friends were early, and found no one arrived; so they were received by a very beautiful young lady, of about eleven years in age, and thirty in self-possession. She was perfectly cool, and filled them with astonishment and admiration.

"Mr. Hetherige is dressing," she said, and added with engaging frankness, "and a terrible time he always takes about it. Landsmen generally do stay finicking about themselves like that. I've seen pa tumble up at the second bell, and be in to prayers in five minutes, as fine as the rest of them. He is not in yet, but he won't be last, I engage."

"Your father is a sailor, then?" said the old priest.

"Yes—Captain Hickson. My name is Miss Hickson—Miss *Emily* Hickson. I am an only daughter. Ma was a Miss Murdoch; she married pa from the Due de St. Privat's house. The Due de St. Privat adopted ma, so I always call the Duke and Duchess grandpa and grandma. They are very amiable, and give me many presents—for example this *étui*, which is certainly elegant." Here she rung the bell, and said to the servant who answered the bell, "Tell cook that I am *certain* Mr. and Mrs. Hetherige will wait dinner for *no* one."

"This is not my house, you know," she exclaimed; "but it is much the same thing. The St. Privats, the Hicksons, the

Hethereges, and Aunt Hester live so much together that we have all things in common. The fact is that, pa being always at sea, we actually have no house at all of our own, but live with the Duke and Duchess at Bolton Row, in a very agreeable house. General Anders also has apartments in our house. He is the most amiable and generous of beings, single through a disappointment in love early in life. Odd he has never married again; if he were to ask me, I would have him, I know that."

"And throw over the present young gentleman—for shame!" said the voice of General Anders behind her.

The young lady was not one whit abashed. "I am not going to be teased about that boy," she said.

"No," said the General; "but don't break with him, because I am old, you know, and he might come in as second string to your bow after I am dead."

They all laughed at this, and Reginald, coming in, found them quite merry; he was quickly followed by his daughter-in-law Mary.

A very sweet and lady-like woman, nearer forty than thirty, very well dressed, and having a pleasant brisk voice. She gave one the idea of having lived in a bandbox all her life, and only coming out of it at rare intervals for the express gratification of her friends. No one would dream, looking at her now, of what she had gone through while the wife of the luckless Charles. To Reginald himself she was like an unreal person at times. Never in their worst trouble had she ever been untidy, though, like all women who cannot afford new clothes, she may have been a little shabby. To remember the old debts and duns, and the pupil whom they took in, and young Barnett frying sausages, and then to look at that fine, matronly woman in pink satin and lace, and her pretty hands, now all innocent of house work, covered with rings, was a strange, almost incredible thing.

Aunt Hester, looking not a bit older, soon followed with her constant friend and squire, Goodge, who was browner and greyer than of yore, but as wiry as ever. To them succeeded the Duke and Duchess, Isabel carrying her age remarkably well; and the party only awaited Captain Hickson, C.B., and his wife.

The wife came in last—the young lady whose remarkable experiences of courtship we have seen. She had lost some of her beauty, and certainly her complexion had not been improved by yellow fever in Jamaica, nor by sitting up all night when her husband was at sea, and it happened to blow in England—she being under the impression, apparently common to sailors' wives in all parts of the world, that when it blows in England it natur-

ally blows hard over every square mile of sea which Britannia rules, and on every acre of land in an empire on which the sun never sets. From a fashionable young lady, she had become a diligent, thrifty, affectionate sailor's wife. Her ideas of education were peculiar, and consisted in letting her only child do exactly as she liked, for fear the child should not be fond of her. The results were to be seen in Miss Hickson, to whom the reader was introduced in her early childhood, ages ago. She was many years older than her mother now.

"Do let me ring for dinner," said that young lady, almost before the various people had exchanged greetings. "Pa may not be here for an hour, and these gentlemen have been here this half-hour." Without waiting for an answer she rung the bell, and so committed Mrs. Hetherage to saying "dinner," the moment the servant appeared. When it was announced she dashed downstairs, and was discovered, when the guests arrived at the dining-room, to be eating maccaroons, as a preparation for a grand dinner of nine *plats*, of all of which she partook freely.

The two clergymen, both of them well used to good society, were rather surprised that a gentleman like Reginald should display so much ostentation. There were too many things, and too much of them; it seemed bad *ton* to the priest particularly, until he noticed that there were two covers vacant, one of which was removed after the soup.

"Now," said Reginald, laughing, "we are all old friends together, for *he* is not coming. Father Morton and Mr. Morley, I apologise for giving you such a grand dinner, but I expected a Greek merchant, and he would have thought very little of me if I had not had a dinner for a king."

"My husband will miss his share of the feast, I fear," said Mrs. Hickson. "He was to have been to the Admiralty, but he must have had to go somewhere else."

"I have got an idea," said Aunt Hester. "I think this means something good."

"About my boy?" said Mrs. Hetherage.

"You are always thinking of your boy," said Reginald. "Hester, what do you mean?"

"I think it may mean an errand to sea."

"For one or both?" said Reginald.

"For both."

Then the conversation became general, and Reginald explained to his two new-found friends that there were hopes of Captain Hickson getting another ship, but that they were a little doubtful at present. He desired continual active service, which was just

now difficult to get. The boy at Chatham, too, was a source of anxiety, for the examinations got harder day by day.

At this moment the butler whispered to Mrs. Hickson, and she went out of the room. She returned very quickly; but her eyes were red, and she trembled.

"Come, my love, tell us all," said Reginald.

"They are both here. Richard has got the *Inconstant* ——"

There was a general cheer. Goodge, the irrepressible, got on a chair and cried, "Now about the boy."

"Fourth on the list, and first prize for mathematics," said Mrs. Hickson, weeping; "goes with Richard to the Pacific."

"*Nonsense!*" shouted Reginald, and he headed towards the door, followed by all the good people save one. Father Morton and Mr. Morley did not consider that they were sufficiently intimate with the family to follow them, and kept their places.

The one member of the family coterie who did not follow the rest of jubilant friends and relations was the little girl. Mr. Morley had conceived that she was a very pert and objectionable little girl, who required strong discipline. He thought so more than ever now. She (that child) was the only one who in any way preserved her equanimity amidst the general joy. She did not seem to care twopence about the matter, and he watched her beautiful still face as she sat in her chair, very pale at first, and very careless. By degrees the face flushed, the eyes grew more prominent and brilliant, and the bosom began to heave; then there was a movement very slight at the corners of the mouth, accompanied with a lowering of the eyelids, and a knitting of the brows, telling of emotion which would not long be suppressed, and then the child buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"That is a fine girl," whispered the Rector to Father Morton; "she feels more than any of them. Look at her pride. She does not think that we are looking at her, or she would have broken her heart sooner than do that."

"I am not so sure," said Father Morton. "I think you are wrong;" and he went round to the girl and said in his quiet way—

"My dear, tell an old man why you cry."

"I am so glad and proud."

"About your father getting his ship?"

"Oh no"—laughing now—"I don't consider that she is good enough for him. He ought to have a fleet. I am so glad and proud about George doing so well. I have taken such pains with that boy—I have had such sleepless nights about him—I have

tried so hard to form his character, that I naturally *am* glad and proud when I see him doing so well. You would be glad yourself, you know. Go away, there is a dear old man, for they are coming back, and they will see that I have been crying."

"There *is* a great deal of stuff in that girl," said the priest to the parson when he went back to him.

Meanwhile the others had come back, swarming around Captain Hickson. They were all in their places again before it was noticed that George and Aunt Hester were missing. Reginald went in search of them, and, coming back, whispered to Emily. That young lady said—

"He won't come unless I go and fetch him, the foolish boy."

She went, and they came in together, she leading him. It was with intense interest naturally that Father Morton and Mr. Morley looked at the son of the man who had been such a deep source of anxiety to them years before.

He was a tall, strong lad, very manly looking, in appearance more like sixteen than fourteen, which latter was his real age. He had very keen, intelligent eyes, and, on the whole, a very modest and pleasing expression. He was handsome, and rather striking; still, to the slight disappointment of those who saw him for the first time, he had certainly none of his father's restless, agreeable vivacity of look. Mr. Morley thought him a considerable improvement on his father, though, and was glad to see how very like he was to his grandfather.

He was sitting between his grandfather and Mr. Morley, while Miss Emily came and sat behind him.

"What will you have for your dinner, my boy?" said Reginald. "There is whitebait—you always liked that."

"I am too happy to eat," said the boy quietly.

"Fudge!" said Emily; "get him whitebait; he won't get any in the Pacific. Who on earth is that nasty man coming in, bothering us just when we were all so happy together? Count Theodorides," she repeated, as the name was announced by the footman. "Bother the man! it is the Greek merchant come, after all. Get him his dinner, in goodness' name, and he will keep George and pa in countenance. George, dear, make room for me between you and Mr. Morley, and we three will love one another very particularly, and talk nonsense. Yes, indeed, Mr. Morley, we will. You saw me crying when I heard that boy had got the prize, and I am going to show you that I don't care twopence for him. Look at the General and Mr. Hetherage, Grandpa Duke and Grandma Duchess, all crowding round that brute of a Greek, and being civil to him. He is one of the Jews, Turks,

infidels, and heretics ; or, as the Sunday-school girl said, Judys, Turkeys, fiddlers, and architects, for whom we pray—with very small effect hitherto it seems to me. I can't bear any of the lot. Look at Aunt Hester—do, I beg of you. She is of my opinion evidently. She does not like that man ; *I* know her, old dear. Her instinct about people is as true as magnetised steel to the pole. Whenever you see Aunt Hester look like that there is a scoundrel in the room. At this moment she might sit at Madame Tussaud's, ticketed as ' Marie Therese, as she appeared on hearing of the invasion of Silesia ; ' only Marie Therese was young enough to be her daughter, and was not half as handsome."

This young lady was, with all her pertness, excessively smart, and had remarked what no one else did in the confusion caused by the entrance of the great Greek financier, nearly an hour late for his dinner. It has been said once before in this chronicle, that one of Aunt Hester's peculiarities was that of assuming a position of exasperating silence. On this occasion there had not been a merrier or more genial lady in the three kingdoms than Aunt Hester. She was drinking her wine and chatting pleasantly, almost noisily, with Mrs. Hetherage, Mrs. Hickson, the Captain, and Goodge ; but when she had once set eyes on the great Greek financier, she became rigidly dumb, and remained so all the evening off and on, until her carriage was called. In the course of the evening the great Greek financier was introduced to her. She rose and gave him a sweeping curtsy, looking him straight in the face. He did the same by her, with a pleasant smile, and she looked very much puzzled. Still she remained silent and *distracte*. Goodge went home with her, and, as he said a long time afterwards, he remembered that she seemed as though she wanted to tell him something, but was afraid. She also went next morning privately to the city, and sold out some Greek mining shares she had, with which M. Theodorides was connected ; but of this she said not one word, not even to Goodge. Old people have singular fancies sometimes.

As she took her candlestick on the night of Reginald's party, she was very nearly speaking to Goodge.

" But he would say that I was mad," she said. " Well, I hope I did not make myself disagreeable to them in the midst of their happiness. I say, Goodge, my dear, that man Theodorides speaks with a strong American accent."

" Yes," said Goodge, yawning ; " he has been an immense deal in America. I don't believe he is a Greek at all—he looks a great rascal."

" Did you ever see any one like him ? " said Hester.

“Can’t say I ever did, or ever want to,” said Goodge. “Good-night.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GENERAL ANDERS EXHIBITS HIS CRAZE MORE STRONGLY.

“WHY,” asked the world, “was this boy, probably heir to almost fabulous wealth, both from the lawsuit and from his inheritance from his grandfather Reginald—why was he to have his hands in the tar bucket? He ought to be in the Guards; he ought to be a plunger; he ought to go to Eton, and be nothing. Why, with all trades to choose from, did they send such a valuable life to sea? They had far better have made him a blacksmith.”

There were one or two reasons for the decision, one of which was that from the earliest years they never could get the boy to turn his mind to anything else. He always coolly assumed that he was to be a sailor, like his early idol, Captain Hickson; and he also assumed (to himself privately) that he should marry Emily Hickson, and that she would sit up windy nights thinking about him when he was at sea. Reginald was the boy’s natural guardian, and no one would have dreamed of interfering with any decision he and the boy’s mother chose to make; but really the boy decided for himself in such a very pronounced way, took his decision so much as a matter of course, that it was never disputed. George was therefore brought up for the sea from his earliest youth.

Reginald had possibly seen that public schools, while they succeed in ninety cases out of a hundred, fail in ten. He had no desire that the boy should go to Eton, of all places—his memories of that place were too bitter; yet, when it became obvious that the boy, even as a preparation for the sea, must go somewhere, he did not object to the Portsmouth school. Captain Hickson told him that if the boy could not stand that he was unfit to stand anything. So it came about that George was taken from his mother’s apron-strings, and seemed on the whole none the worse for it, perhaps better. At all events, he left the school with the highest character and with actual success, as we have already seen.

So George departed with Captain Hickson to be made a real

sailor of. Emily Hickson immediately gave herself all the airs of a sailor's wife, not only religiously, but in other ways. She gave nearly all her pocket-money to the life-boat association, and with the remainder she bought a barometer, which she carefully studied for above a fortnight. At the end of that time she got a fright, or said she did, in the middle of the night about the weather, and came downstairs to the back room in the third storey, in her night-gown, with a candle, to look at her barometer. It was much as she had left it, and she was consoled. But her peering curiosity led her to examine its external construction. It was an old-fashioned barometer, with a pool of quicksilver in an ornamental stoup at the bottom. She addressed the instrument sentimentally, as the guardian of her loved one, which gave her notice of his dangers. She then pulled out the tube to see how it did act. The mercury at once shot over her, and down to her feet. She gave a wild yell, and cried "Thieves" as loud as she could. The house, or at least one member of it, was by her side with singular rapidity. She had scarcely discovered that nothing was the matter, when General Anders, in his shirt and trousers, was in the room, with a light in one hand and a Colt's revolver in the other. He uttered a noun substantive—since converted into, and used as, an adjective by the Americans—simply as an interjection, and then passed the candle rapidly round the walls.

The Duke and Duchess were in the room almost immediately, in their dressing gowns. Emily thought that they would be angry with her, and took her usual method of getting out of a difficulty—that of telling the exact truth.

She did this with such perfect and entire frankness as regards detail, that it is not necessary to follow her. To prove that she was in no way departing from fact, she showed them her right shoe, half full of mercury, and declared that she had caught her death of cold. No one minded her, for the Duke and the General were talking.

"What a farce this is, my friend!" said the Duke. "All the ghost castles in Lorraine are not so ridiculous as this house. The child comes to see her plaything in the night; she pours the mercury on her bosom; she screams. The bravest, wisest, most shrewd old friend I have comes down like a lunatic, and we like lunatics follow. Do put an end to this absurd mystery, old friend."

"You do not know of what you speak," said General Anders; "nothing will prevent my taking my own course in the matter. I am by no means the fool you take me to be; at least, I will have my own way in this business."

He was singularly confused and unlike himself, and the Duke shrugged his shoulders.

“Would any one believe this of you?” he said; but before there was time for reply, Emily said—

“If there is any mystery, pray let me know nothing of it. My present opinion is that the present company have all made fools of themselves, myself among the number. Suppose we go to bed.”

They did so without more words; but it was painfully evident to the Duke and Duchess that the shrewdest financier of the day was quite as crotchety as his eminent father, on one point at all events, and that there was a latent vein of unreasoning obstinacy in his character which developed more as time went on.

“Every man,” said the Duke to his wife that night sententiously, “has a bee in his bonnet. I have one, but it is generally quiet. Anders has got a gigantic bee, and you never know when it will buzz.”

“Exactly,” said Isabel, who seemed to understand her lord’s simile. “He is right on every other point; on this one he is morally insane. It is a strange psychological study.”

“It is a great *nuisance*!” said the Duke.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REGINALD GOES INTO PARLIAMENT.

THE lightest student of history must have remarked that great characters are occasionally urged on by their Daimon to do things which live in immortal story, without apparently any adequate reason. As examples we should quote the expedition of the first Napoleon to Moscow; the attack of the second Napoleon on the Prussians; and the entirely gratuitous assumption on the part of most of the recent rulers of France, that the nation generally does not wish to see all and sundry of them at the bottom of the sea. We strongly suspect that the Daimon’s real name is Legion, and that he is merely the representative of partial friends. A man is told that he must do a thing, and so he does it, very often when he would a thousand times sooner leave it alone. We suspect that a twice-desolated France owes her position more to the flatterers of her rulers than to any wickedness and folly of those rulers personally.

Not that we wish these remarks to apply to that portion of our tale which we are about to tell, or at least only in part. It is certain that Reginald did himself no harm by the action he took, but rather good. We only mean to say that he would never have gone into Parliament had he not been urged by his friends; and, indeed, the fact that he did so is so unimportant, that we only chronicle a part of his history, showing his painful feebleness of will when collective persuasions were brought to bear upon him.

Business had been getting greater and greater, until it began to be overwhelming. A great banking and bill-discounting house was now almost entirely in the hands of Anders, Hetherage, Talbot, Murdoch, and Simpson; but no name appeared except that of the original founders of the house, Lorton & Co., who had realised, and left scarcely anything but their names behind them. Not a single member of the great firm was in Parliament, except two members of the old firm, who had long since really left it, and Lord Snizort in the House of Lords, who had still a trifle of interest in the concern. It was thought that some one of the new men should be in Parliament to represent the new blood. Reginald was pitched upon as the man, and he at once flatly refused.

Then the Daimon, in the form of partial friends, began to act on him. Aunt Hester began, the most consistent and powerful of his friends. His reply to her was, that if one of the firm had to go into Parliament, General Anders was the man. Aunt Hester retired *then*, and said no more. By this action of Aunt Hester, Reginald knew that he was a doomed man. A general gets ready his artillery, his cavalry, his infantry, his mitrailleuses, his pontoon trains, his commissariat, and war correspondents for the daily newspaper press of the world. He shows a bold front to the enemy, and the enemy retreats. He dashes forward with his correspondents ready for a victory, and lo! the enemy is not to be found. However far forward he may push his cavalry outposts, still no enemy! Then dead, dull fear settles on his heart, for he knows that he is outflanked. He then retreats to his base of operations, and finds that the enemy is between safety and himself. When Aunt Hester retreated so calmly, he felt himself at once in Parliament making a fool of himself. He was certain that she would take him in the rear somehow, and on the principle that a man's foes are they of his own household, he concluded that she would not hesitate to use the dearest and tenderest feelings of his heart against him. Still he meant to fight, for he perfectly well knew that this move against him was only the precursor to another; and we shall see how right he was. He was getting

old; he had a great deal to do—for General Anders was sometimes very rash, and he required all his wits about him. He thought, most sincerely, that it would do the new firm no good if his head was removed from its councils. It would, he felt sure, be infinitely better if another man was sent to Parliament, and he was left to use all his genius and diligence in preserving some homogeneity in the vast speculations. He meant to express his opinion about the whole matter; but he never expected to win after Aunt Hester had fired her one shot, limbered up and gone away full gallop.

He remained strictly on the defensive, however. The enemy did not show at all. Except that there was a most transcendent and unnatural civility exhibited towards him by the whole clique, from Aunt Hester down to Miss Emily, he would have guessed that he had won, and that the enemy was in cantonments, or departed entirely. But their devotion to him was so ostentatiously great, that he felt nothing was open to him but an honourable surrender, after a protest. He had some curiosity, however, to see in what manner they would make a victim of him.

He believed that he should not be attacked singly and in detail by the enemy, but that they would appear in force. One evening, at Bolton Row, he found them all assembled in the drawing-room, such as had not come to dinner having arrived afterwards, and gone upstairs. It was evident that the time was come.

“I am getting very old,” said Aunt Hester, getting closer to the fire. “I don’t expect that I shall last much longer.”

“We are all getting older,” said the General. “I am more than seventy.”

“I am more than sixty,” said Hester.

“I am of an unknown age,” said the Duchess; “but certainly sixty.”

“I am forty,” said Mary.

“I do not choose to tell my age,” said Mrs. Hickson.

“I am thirteen,” said Emily.

“And I,” said Reginald, “am sixty-six.”

Then there was a pause. No one seemed to know what to say next.

“It would be a good thing if you were to go into Parliament, General,” said Aunt Hester. “It would be the honourable end to a useful life.”

“You mean that Parliament would finish him at once,” said Reginald. “I quite agree with you there; and so, as I can’t do without him, I would rather that he stayed out.”

“I have no intention of doing anything of the kind,” said the

General. "It is certainly necessary that one connected with the firm should be in Parliament—that is a matter of paramount and overwhelming importance; and so I have written to young Simpson, asking him to stand for Tolliton, which will be vacant in a few days. I have no fear but that he will do as he is asked."

"That is a very good idea of yours, General," said Aunt Hester. "The man is a fool about anything but his trade, and will, no doubt, make a great mess of it. He understands absolutely nothing but American business; whereas we should have had a man with a general view of all our affairs. Still we must have what we can get."

"It will be rather ruinous for us, will it not," said Mary, "to have a man like that, who absolutely cares for nothing whatever in this world but himself? And the antecedents of his lost brother can scarcely be forgotten. It is bad enough to be connected with the brother of a forger, but to send him to represent one in Parliament is rather strong."

"If we cannot do anything else we must do that, I suppose," said the Duchess, who had always great influence with her brother. "It is a sad pity; but I know that Arthur only thought about it after a great deal of worry and trouble. I quite back Arthur up, but bad is the best. I should have asked Arthur to go, but he is too old, and has too much upon his shoulders."

Miss Emily said that when they had all said what they really wanted to say, she would express her opinion. Meanwhile, Reginald had been sitting at the writing-desk and busily writing, pretending not to listen, though every one knew that he was attending to every word. At last he rose with a paper in his hands, and said—

"My dear friends, allow me to read this to you. I think you will agree;" and so he read—

"To the Enlightened and Independent Electors of Tolliton.

"GENTLEMEN,—Having been almost unanimously called upon by you to solicit your suffrages at the election of a Member of Parliament for your Borough as soon as the breath is out of the body of your present Member, I beg to inform you that I, with the greatest reluctance, propose to step into his shoes." (Murmurs of delighted applause from the audience, which Reginald suppressed with a wave of his hand).

"I have no qualifications for a Parliamentary life, and I have no desire to undertake one. I have been a very heavy and successful speculator in various ways, and the gentlemen with

whom I am connected in business think it necessary that one of them should enter Parliament. Great pressure has been put upon me, and I am now willing to do so. The only question which remains is the price. I think your price too high, and I must request you to lower it. Your present Member bought you, body and bones, for £5,600; but then he was backed by the —— Club, which I am not. I consider £5,000 the utmost that I can pay, when I consider the interests of my partners. This money will come out of the pockets of my firm, and not from any club.

“Every member of the firm with which I have the honour of being connected is, like myself, a Liberal. I shall, however, on the question of the day, vote consistently against the Repeal of the Corn Laws, entirely against my conscience. My reason for this course of action is that if I did not so pledge myself, an opposition might be raised against me, which might cost me money. The Right Honourable Baronet at the head of the Government is going to rat: the only political pledge which I publicly make is, that I will not rat with him.”

“I think that will do,” said Reginald, folding up the paper, and handing it to the General. “You and I had better go down to-morrow, had we not? It is no use waiting till the man is dead; no one does it now.”

There was a general laugh, for they had won. But Reginald most solemnly declared that nothing should induce him to go down to Tolliton unless that address was agreed to.

It was agreed to without much trouble, for they knew that it was only a joke of his; and the matter dropped, for that evening at all events. Reginald had consented to buy the little borough, and there was no difficulty at all about the business. He was to go into Parliament, though what he was to do when he got there was quite another affair.

Mary came up to his bedroom that night, as she usually did, when he was sitting before the fire previous to going to bed. It may be remembered that this was an old arrangement between them. She kissed him and thanked him, saying that it was so noble of him.

“Not at all, my dear,” he said; “it is all part of the day’s work. At one time I thought that my *rôle* in life was to be the poorest and most unfortunate of men; now it appears that I am to be the richest and most successful. It is so great a nuisance to a man of quiet tastes like myself to be in this prominent position, that the mere fact of being in Parliament is very little extra. Besides, now I find that I *must* go, I have a sort of

amused curiosity about the whole thing. I cannot conceive what I shall be next! I suspect that I shall live ten years. I wonder what will happen in that time? Were it not for the boy, it would be very amusing to find myself a beggar again."

"No chance of that, papa," said Mary, laughing.

"I don't know," said Reginald. "Anders is a very queer, crotchety fellow, clever as he is. He is pursuing a course of action now, and undertaking a responsibility, which I would not undertake for the revenues of India."

"Financially?" asked Mary.

"Oh no! I was laughing when I said we might be beggars again. I don't distrust his finance very much. What I allude to is a very different thing. I am afraid he knows something which he is foolishly afraid to speak about."

CHAPTER XXX.

SOME GHOSTS BEGIN TO RISE.

THE preparations for Reginald's getting into Parliament were very simple. He had got the money; he had given the pledge, the only one asked at that time; he had only to pay it and become M.P. Before he had time to do so, however, an event occurred which made his election rather a matter of secondary importance.

Simpson, the partner in the firm (if firm it could be called), was the partner most entrusted with the American business. His wife has appeared once before in these pages—a fat, evil-tempered woman, whom no one liked. There was nothing in any way remarkable about her, except that her son had committed forgery and had disappeared. She was certainly a managing woman—nay, rather a bullying woman. The first mark she left upon the affairs of those who were connected with her was to die in a rather singular and unexpected manner.

She was not given to going out by herself; she was a very lazy woman. Yet she went out one morning from her home at Chelsea quite alone, and was last seen going on board a steamboat at the Cadogan pier. She never came home any more. She was found dead in Rosherville Gardens by Count Theodorides, who happened to be walking there. He raised an alarm and brought assistance to the spot, but the unhappy lady was dead, and nearly cold. Mr.

Simpson was a very well-known man in London, and there was a great stir over the matter. There was a *post mortem* examination and an inquest. Count Theodorides was the principal witness. Mr. Simpson refused to attend the inquest. It leaked out that the sudden shock had been too much for his intellect, and that he was out of his mind.

To Count Theodorides had fallen the very painful duty of bringing the intelligence. With a delicacy which could not be too highly appreciated, he came first to Reginald, and broke the matter to him. "You are so used to see the dark and light side of the world, Mr. Hetheridge, that you would do my lamentable errand better than I could do it myself."

Reginald never in his life hesitated in an errand of mercy or good-nature, and he went.

One would sooner be hung than carry such news, and Reginald felt it. He did his miserable errand as gently as possible. He pointed out to Simpson, his cousin, that we were all mortal, and that he, Reginald, had lived so many lives that he cared not how soon his own time came. Then he told Simpson quietly that he would never see the woman who had been a kind and gentle partner to him for so many years any more. When the first burst of grief, violent and honest, was over, Simpson asked for explanation (as Reginald thought) in a very sensible, manly way. Reginald told him everything—that she had been found dead in the garden at Rosherville. Mr. Simpson was aghast with astonishment, which showed itself through his grief. Then Reginald explained how Count Theodorides, walking there, had found her. From that moment Simpson never spoke one word good or bad.

The lady had died of heart disease, it appeared. She had on her usual rings, with a great deal of money, and in her purse she had bank-notes for a thousand pounds. The papers got hold of all the facts at the inquest, and it became in their hands, "The mysterious death of a lady in Rosherville Gardens."

"It was a mercy," said the coroner, "that the unhappy lady was found by Count Theodorides. She would have been a rich booty for any straggling thief."

The town had scarcely recovered its equanimity, when it received another shock. Mr. Simpson died, it was strongly suspected, by his own hand, though that was never exactly proved. A temporary difficulty occurred in the administration of his affairs, as his eldest son was at Charleston: it was the younger to whom General Anders had written to stand in Parliament. Rumours got about in the city that his affairs were not in good order, and our friends had a temporary run upon them, which they met with

perfect fortitude. When Mr. Simpson's affairs were cleared up, it was found that he had died very wealthy, but that his connection with Lorton and Co., though at one time large, was now smaller than any one had anticipated. The whole affair was important at one time, and was not easily forgotten. Meanwhile, the member for Tolliton was dead.

On his death, Reginald was of course ready. The whole matter was perfectly understood by all parties, and Reginald had very little to do. A certain pledge was entered into which never was broken, and then he went down to the nomination and made his speech. It was a singularly able one, to the surprise of those who did not know that the ex-clerk, who had resigned without pension, was one of the best financial writers of the day. There were leading articles about it; and Reginald, by merely talking over again his old essays, found himself famous as a strikingly original statesman. He entered Parliament, in short, with a career before him. So General Anders told him the night he came home after his election, and Hester concurred.

"A career," said Reginald; "yes, at sixty-five. Anders and Hester, I have been tired of the world ever since Charles died."

"I also am tired of the world," said the General; "but I mean to live and work on."

"I wish, then, that you had gone into Parliament instead of me," said Reginald.

"Well, I will be plain with you, Hetherège. I dare not. I cannot trust myself. Now that you have done what I asked you to do, I will tell you the truth. I am subject to dangerous illusions; I might make some fearful fiasco."

"Yes," said Reginald.

"I have not led a healthy life. I have never known a family life. Ever since I was born I have lived more with the dead than with the living; and the older I grow, the dead are more continually and constantly with me. I was never afraid of the dead in the old house at Bolton Row, but my nerves get so bad that I see dead people in broad daylight. Why, it is not a fortnight ago that I saw a man who has been dead this five years—dead, ay, and scalped too, according to Goodge—in the flesh, talking to you."

"There is no insanity about that," said Hester quietly, "for I saw him also. At least I saw the man you mean. It is a remarkable likeness; but the man is not the same man, as I can perfectly well prove. I was very much startled by the likeness, but I have entire proofs as to who the man is. He is quite as near a relation to us as the man we took him for, but not legiti-

mate. Theodorides is merely an illegitimate Simpson from Virginia. Scamp I believe him to be, but he is not the man."

"Well, I will believe that he is not. Put him by—I see others whom I have known, and whom I know are dead. If I told you whom I saw you would disprove the fact over and over again; but I have lost credit in my own senses. Hetherage, let me whisper in your ear."

The calm face of Reginald got troubled as he did so. When the General had finished, he said—

"I'll tell you what, my friend, that is sheer Midsummer madness. You have been burning the candle at both ends, and you want rest. You had better break that ridiculous old room of yours open, I think. You really must not talk such nonsense. We must get these cobwebs out of his brain, Hester."

"Which is the last?" said Hester.

"He says that he saw that tipsy vagabond, Thomas Morris, alive, and walking in the street," said Reginald.

"Oh, nonsense," said Hester; "the man died at Hobart Town of drink, five years ago, in a penitent and godly manner. Why, we had the letter from the clergyman himself describing the death-bed scene. Come, Reginald, we must have him to 'fresh scenes and pastures new.' Unfold your project, and we will all be buried in the same churchyard. I shall have the place nearest the yew. Come, no more of this nonsense; unfold your plans, and let us be happy."

Lest our readers should accuse us of keeping them in the dark about matters which they should know, we beg to inform them that General Anders was not in the least mad. Thomas Morris was not only alive, but had given up drinking, except on occasions, finding that it did not agree with him. Nothing was more common, under the old system, than for partially-freed convicts to exchange passports and names. Thomas Morris had done this. The man who had changed names with him had also used that name to marry with; and having a wife and family, likewise being possessed of human feelings, he had used certain information he possessed about Thomas Morris to provide for his wife and family by a claim *ad misericordiam* on the General when he was dying. The General had handsomely responded, and Isabel had sent something. The spurious widow was at that present moment keeping an exceedingly disreputable public-house on the Christian charity of these two, which a misguided clergyman had unwittingly helped to procure for them. The real Thomas Morris was alive and well, a farmer near Sydney—so prosperous that he could leave

his farm to the care of his wife, and come to England on the best of all Australian speculations at that time : that of buying a stud horse of good pedigree. He *had* met General Anders full face in Piccadilly ; and, after giving £350 for a horse, had departed with it, meditating an early return to Australia.

CHAPTER XXXI.

REGINALD BECOMES A SQUIRE.

It has been mentioned that General Anders and Reginald both had a fancy for investing their money in land—in the line of a railway if possible ; if not, elsewhere. The General never bought land on sentimental grounds ; Reginald, on the other hand, very often did. This enabled Aunt Hester to follow up her victory about Parliament by one more dear to her heart, and Reginald made but little resistance in the second case, for he very much wished to be forced into doing the thing he wished to do himself.

He was now, in his young old age, the gentle, biddable, unselfish being he had always been, about as happy in his wealth as he was in his poverty as regarded himself. As far as regarded other people, he was much happier. Never having cared for himself, he had stood the checks of adversity or prosperity with a perfectly equal mind—only feeling for others. He had a great object in his mind now. He must die soon, and he wished to leave something tangible behind him besides mere money. He wanted to leave to his boy, the sailor, a visible pledge of the love which he had borne alike to the boy and the boy's father.

“ My money will never remind the boy of me,” he argued. “ So many sovereigns are so many sovereigns, each like the other, and with an abominable bad likeness of the boy's Sovereign on every one. He will think far more of Her Majesty than he will of me if I only leave him money. I will leave him something which shall force him to remember me. When he is old and storm-tossed at sea in his profession, and land-tossed by the disgraceful behaviour of an ungrateful Admiralty, he shall have a place to go to, with his children about him, and defy the Admiralty from his own castle.”

He took the boy's mother, his most intimate friend, into his counsel. The two good souls laid their heads together, and their

nefarious designs were just ready when Reginald went into Parliament, and Mr. Simpson died. To explain what their plans were, it is necessary to go back to the eleventh century of the Christian era. We shall not be long; but unless we are exhaustive we are nought.

Overwhelmed and distracted by centuries of civil war, cast from one dynasty to another—often from a dozen or so at nearly the same time—unhappy England found a temporary peace under the strong hand of William the Conqueror. The most turbulent of his so-called barons, and consequently the most difficult to satisfy, was Geoffry de Pierrepont (Pierrepont is in Lorraine, not very far from St. Privat; but this is merely a coincidence). William of Normandy, to satisfy Pierrepont, gave him twenty-five thousand acres in Dorsetshire, which did not belong to him; but that in those times did not at all matter. Pierrepont built a castle which his subsequent neighbour, the famous Godfrey, at Bouillon, copied as closely as possible, and which was several times burnt down in successive ages. At length, in the end of the reign of Elizabeth, when the twenty-five thousand acres had diminished to ten, the then Pierrepont built a very beautiful Tudor house out of the ruins of the last Bouillonesque castle, combined with the masonry from the Abbey of the Holy Cross, granted to the family by Henry VIII., and betook himself to trade (principally slaves) and politics.

Nothing ever went right with this family, but, as the country people said, they took a deal of killing. The end came, in a disgraceful bankruptey at the end of George the Fourth's reign, when the house, with the last remaining four thousand acres, was put up for sale.

An extremely public-spirited citizen bought it, and started as country gentleman. He had been Lord Mayor, and had done splendidly in that capacity, *working* the city of London as a good parson or squire works his parish. But he was not content with civic honours; he had been made a baronet, and, regardless of the experience of the old Venetian families, he had come to the conclusion that a baronet must of necessity become a country gentleman. He bought Hollingscroft, and started in that capacity, having, meanwhile, brought up his sons as dandies.

They rapidly ruined his town business by carelessness and extravagance. As to his country estate, he ruined that for himself. Being neither a Mechi nor a Waterlow, he attempted to carry his habits of city order, thrift, supply and demand, into the country. Without one scintilla of the genius of the two gentlemen above named, he tried the experiment of farming for himself. A

lease of a farm of 1,500 acres had run out; he took it into his own hands, and made experiments with it, in advance of the agriculture of the day. Mr. Meehi can tell us best what Tiptree cost him before he proved to the world that high farming on bad lands will pay if you have capital at your back. Mr. Meehi has been a benefactor to the State; Alderman Jones, on the other hand, was only so far a benefactor to the State as to prove emphatically that the most amusing way of ruining yourself is by fancy-farming, if you know exactly nothing at all about the matter.

With one thing or another, however, Sir James Jones finished up the property rather more suddenly than the Pierreponts could have managed. They had been out-at-elbows for many centuries, and had learnt, in the school of adversity, the value of economy; they were, therefore, notoriously the bitterest screws in the county of Dorset. Their general rule was to pay nobody they could possibly help, and to pay the rest as little as possible. Their smash came by the Pierrepont of the time carrying the principle a little too far. He not only inherited the accumulated debts of his family, but he determined to accumulate as many more as could be managed during the limited time which he allotted himself for life. At his death the exasperated creditors of the family, in conclave assembled, determined that they would know the worst at once. The estate was sold, and gave about eighteen pence in the pound. Sir James Jones bought it, and began sowing money broadcast. He was hailed with acclamation.

He soon began to feel the want of money. Things got worse and worse in the city, and tolerably bad in the country. At this time Jones began selling land, and Reginald Hetherege began buying it from him acre by acre.

The process was slow, but inexorable. Reginald hemmed Jones in by a cordon as complete as that put round Paris. Capitulation was only a matter of time. Sir James Jones found the time when he could not drive to the nearest post town without passing through the land of Reginald Hetherege.

Then came a somewhat disgraceful smash in the city through the misconduct of one of his sons. It was evident to Sir James that he must give up Hollingscroft in order to keep his head above water. He wrote to Reginald a very frank and manly letter, worthy of one of the best aldermen which London ever saw.

“DEAR SIR,—You have so much of my land, that I think you had better take the remainder.

“The deuce fly away with all country pursuits! I am back to

town again, and will never move any further from London than Highgate. I have lost £50,000 here; for treble that sum you may succeed me. I am sick of it altogether. I have never had a moment's peace since I have been here. I am going back to my desk: I will soon put things right there.

"If you buy this estate you will lose a fearful sum of money over it. They say that if you put money into the land it will come out again. I don't see it. I have put half the Lobos Islands into this land in the form of guano, not to mention superphosphate, and the only result has been straw instead of grain, and greens instead of turnips. Meanwhile, the trout-fishing association of the River Low are going to prosecute me for poisoning the river and destroying the fish.

"I have built new cottages, and killed off all the old people suffering from rheumatism by putting them in strong draughts under the new system of ventilation. I have drained all the old cottages, and introduced typhus by stirring up old stinks. I have refused to prosecute a single poacher, and consequently all the young men have taken to the practice of that art, and the neighbourhood has become debauched. In short, I have been a model landlord in every way, and have consequently made the devil's own mess of it.

"If you like to succeed me, say the word, and I am your man. If you are a brute you may possibly avoid ruin; otherwise, nothing will save you. I, as you know, actually gave up my seat in Parliament for your borough to old C——, because the truth is——"

* * * * *

(What the truth was need not be mentioned here. Sir James was not in cash, and Mr. C—— was.)

"I hope you did not give ——. It was far too much.

* * * * *

"One or two will regret me, but very few, I fear. There is one thing I wish to speak to you about. I am not without means, my dear Mr. Hetherage, in spite of my losses. There are one or two tenants in arrears, and I should like to help them if I could. The widow Austin must go to the workhouse for a time, but I will get her into an almshouse. Her son must enlist. I think that will be best. He is a very high-spirited young man, and possibly is better in the army.

"I shall be at Garrard's on Thursday.

"JAMES JONES."

General Anders acted for Reginald in the purchase, going down by himself, and deciding what stock and furniture he would retain. Reginald wished him to buy the whole thing as it stood, and the General yielded. "We may as well buy the clock going in perfect order," he said; "it would cost you more to wind it up yourself afresh." So everything was taken as it stood, and Reginald had now the wish of his heart. He would have Hollingscroft for his boy, and his boy should found a family there—for the money was no difficulty. He spoke to General Anders about it, and the General was overjoyed. He offered to advance the money on the most advantageous rate: "For you see, Hetherage, that what Hester says is true. I have been too busy. Get this place on any terms. You and I cannot do without each other now. Let us make you head of the family, and let me come and lay my aching old head in your country-house. What did Hester say, that she was to have the place nearest the yew-tree in the church-yard? Nay, Reginald, she shall not; that place is mine. I could not understand her when she said that, but I understand her now that this beautiful scheme is unfolded. Reginald, I am so tired; make a place for me to die in. All that I have is yours, except a little, comparatively little, to Isabel. We are getting old, Reginald, but we may leave much behind us to those we love—unless," he added, with a sudden fierce scowl, "scoundrels intervene; and the Lord help them if they do. Reginald, I am like you; I have never lived for myself. As far as I am personally concerned I would die to-morrow, and bear no one ill-will. But let no man, born of woman, come between me and those I love. I have met in the circle which has drawn itself around you so naturally—for you are the most amiable and constant of all—rest, peace, and love. I desire that this little circle, amidst which I have found the only home I ever knew, should benefit by my death, and remember me in their prayers. God help the man who comes between me and my wish!"

"Is there anything at Bolton Row which might prevent it?" asked Reginald.

"Oh no; certainly not. Never think of it; never allude to it. There can be nothing there to trouble us. There may be death for me, but nothing to hurt you. I dare not speak of it; I am not myself when I think of it, and the dread of that room has become a mental disease. There may be something there worse than hell. Why, foolish man, what could there be concerning us?—ha! ha! All the money we have has been made by ourselves. If the devil were to break out of that room to-morrow he could not take from us what we have got. Keep your eyes abroad

in every direction, and realise—that has been our rule from the first. Stick to it, old friend, and mark my words, now for ever, Hetherige: *the time will come when you must withdraw from these speculations, and make a home for us all.* I shall never cease; but you must. The time will come when you must get quietly out of the firm. I will never go beyond possibility of payment in full; but I might come to you an honest beggar, with perfectly clean hands, having injured no one—or I might die with a million. It shall be one thing or another. You get round you a place where we may all assemble sometimes, talk over old times, and die.”

Estates of this magnitude are not so rapidly transferred, even on payment of cash, as they might be. There is a cry in certain quarters now for “free land.” Not knowing what that means exactly, but finding it coupled with a “free breakfast-table,” we suppose it means an easy transfer of land, which would certainly be a great boon both to buyer and seller. The idea among some people, however, is that we are going to breakfast at the charge of the State gratis, and peg out eighty-acre allotments in Windsor Park. Much is to be done in the way of legislation, however, before the waste lands of England can be occupied by that class of gentry called in Australia “cockatoo” farmers. Reginald had been a Member of Parliament for three weeks (though, as the House was not sitting, it did not much matter) before he took possession of Hollingscroft. He at once got ready to take possession; but before he started he got the following note from Mr. Morley:—

“DEAR OLD FRIEND,—I hear you are going to be a county gentleman. I know two people on your estate very well; I think you would like to know about them.

“The first is the rector (by the way, you have the presentation). The rector is very old and bed-ridden, but he knows every man, woman, and child in the parish. He has done splendidly by that parish, and has pretty nearly spent his income—£460—there, having a considerable private fortune. He is an old saint, and will give you good advice, spiritual and temporal.

“The second is Charles Owthwaite, the curate. He is an extremely singular person. He was at Oriel with me, and would have had his Fellowship, only that he insisted on marrying. He does not belong to this world at all, except in the way of sharing its evils; his mind is entirely fixed on the next. I can hardly tell you how to get on with him, he is so fearfully inexorable. If you err in the slightest manner he will rebuke you heavily; and,

possibly, in the pulpit—that he does not consider too sacred a place for personalities. You will find him very difficult to deal with, but worth his weight in diamonds.

“The rector will not last long, and I have a request to make to you. Use your influence with the next rector to get Owthwaite kept on. He gets £130 a year for the charge of the parish, and he would break his heart if he was moved from among his people. I am not so poor as I was once, and if there is any difficulty about his salary, I will help to make it good. Try not to move him, like a kind soul.”

Reginald went down, and took possession alone. He had taken furniture and everything with the house, and on a moonlight night he found himself driving up to the house which was now his own. He had not known the previous occupant, and so the place was new to him. He saw vast lawns and dark shrubberies bathed in the moonlight, while a fountain backed with thickets and groups of trees pierced the night air like a needle of silver. His man dismounting, rang the bell, which echoed through the house; but no dog barked welcome, and Reginald somehow felt sad in the midst of his satisfaction. “Poor fellow!” he thought; “how he must have loved this place! I feel most desperately like an intruder. I wish he had left a favourite dog behind him; I would have taken care of it for him.”

The night was chilly, and Reginald had to ring twice. At last a light was seen passing many windows, and the door was unbarred by a very demure old lady, who looked at him with profound scorn, and at once took the key out of the door and gave it to him. He put it in his pocket, and, having seen his portmanteau in, shut his servant out to see after the horses. Then he stood with the demure old lady in what appeared to him a noble old hall, with pictures, antlers, skins, armour, and many other things hung on the wall. The windows were very high, and the moonlight streamed in, and patched the floor with the stains of many-coloured glass. The thing was so grand and sombre that he was awed in spite of himself, and he shuddered.

“So this is *mine*!” he said. “After so many years’ toil and misfortune I have come to *this*. It is utterly unreal. Is it actually *mine*?”

The old lady said, “Yes, sir; it is all yours. An improvement on Brixton.”

“Why, I don’t know that,” said Reginald. “I was very happy at Brixton. Did you know me there?”

“I was your next-door neighbour, and I gave warning in consequence of what went on there.”

“Did you now, really?” said Reginald. “That was very public-spirited. I suppose that you have often talked about old times down here?”

“Never one word, sir. I know my position. I return to my brother at the end of the week, and I hope to give you satisfaction in the meantime. I have been housekeeper here some years now.”

“I hope you will remain so,” said Reginald. “Can you show me to a fire?”

The old lady relented, and Reginald was shown to a nice suite of apartments to the rear. Everything was ready for him, and he was waited on at supper by a nice little maid. There was very admirable wine, and he asked the superintending old lady where she got it. She informed him that it was his own, and then he remembered that he *had* taken one hundred and twenty dozen of choice wine, which was, by a mistake, classed among the “fixtures” in the estimate. The wine was exceedingly good, however, and he drank two or three glasses of it; after which he began to feel that he was actually in possession.

The old lady came in and said, “Sir, I am very much obliged to you for your offer of staying, but I have elected to go before your family come. I think I should be happier.”

“Yes,” said Reginald, “but you are not going, for all that. Come here and sit down; I want very much to talk to you.”

The old lady said, “I thank you for your condescension, sir. I will do so, if you please, for the first and last time in your presence.”

“Now have a glass of wine, Mrs. ——”

“Davies, sir.”

“Mrs. Davies; yes, I remember you now. My servant and horses are bestowed?”

“Yes, sir. And I have a petition to make you; I am sure you will not be angry with me.”

“It is granted without anger,” said Reginald. “What is it?”

“It is about a dog, sir. I am going away, and I can’t take the dog and her puppy with me. Will you take care of them?”

“Will I?” said Reginald. “Only try me.”

Mrs. Davies opened the door, and called. There came in a very old bloodhound and her puppy, the puppy nearly as big as its mother. The old dog was about the size of a young lion,

the young one about the size of a panther. The old one smelt Reginald, and then set up a long sonorous howl. The puppy idiotically got inside the fender, and threw itself down to sleep as if the preliminary to this action was to break every bone in its body.

“You will take care of these dogs, sir?”

“Yes, most truly,” said Reginald. “Now, what do these dogs mean? they mean something more than you choose to say. A woman never told the whole truth at once. What is it? You want me to take care of some one else?”

“You guess well, sir.”

“Who is it, then?”

“Mr. Owthwaite. Oh, sir, the rector is dying, and when the new rector comes he will never take to Mr. Owthwaite’s ways without a strong recommendation. Make it a point with your new rector to keep Mr. Owthwaite, or he will break his heart—he has been father of this parish, under and with the rector, so many years. Say a good word for him, sir.”

“You see,” said Reginald, “that the matter does not rest with me at all; it rests with the next rector. Mr. Owthwaite is a very outspoken man, I hear, and there will be difficulty. I will do all I can.”

“Well, sir, you can do no more. I would say one word about the widow Austin; but you must see to that for yourself.”

“I will,” said Reginald; and so the old woman departed, leaving Reginald and the dogs together.

He sat long; then he roused the dogs and took the candle. The housekeeper had shown him his room, which adjoined the one in which he had had his supper, and he looked into that; all was very quiet there, and he saw that his bed was ready. The dogs waited on his orders as though he had been their master for years. He called them by the names which the old woman had given them, and they came fawning to him. A sudden thought struck him—he would go over his new house, his own house, alone with the dogs.

He took them back into the room where he had his supper, and gave them the bits of it; he was their master now. It was only a change of ministry, he thought. They never barked when he rang the bell: they were instructed not to do so. He had heard similar directions given to clerks when a new head was coming into office. “Poor brutes, though,” he said; “they are only bloodhounds, like P—— and C——, who tried to hunt me down and get my place when I made that mess in my accounts. Come on, you dogs, and follow the rising sun.”

It was a wonderfully beautiful old house ; and, with the dogs at his heels, he went from corridor to gallery, from gallery to drawing-room, from drawing-room to picture-gallery, ever, at intervals, encountering the moon looking in through the mullioned windows. " Can it be all *mine* ? " he said half a dozen times ; and on looking at the pictures left in the gallery he came to the conclusion that it probably was. " That Madonna," he said aloud, " is a beastly bad copy, a copy from a copy. It is not worth twenty pounds." A short examination showed him that the valuer had certainly done his duty by his employer, and he really began to believe that the house was not only his own, but that he had paid rather heavily for some speculations of the late Jones in the picture way which were, for some unknown reason, ticketed in the valuation as " heirlooms."

Still the house was beautiful, mysterious, and vast. The family portraits of the Pierreponts were impressive, and he ought not in the least degree to have wondered if one of them had come out of the frame and denounced him as an intruder. (We believe that this is nearly the twentieth time on which this idea has done duty, and that Reginald would have been unutterably astonished if anything of the kind had taken place.) He was, however, extremely surprised at one thing. He was prepared for any number of ghosts, but yet was very much astonished at seeing one.

At the end of the great drawing-room he sat down, and put the candle on the table. The dogs came to him for more bones ; the candle suddenly burnt into the socket, went out, and he was left darkling, with the charming reflection that he was in his own house with two bloodhounds, but that he did not know how on earth to get back to his own bedroom.

The inconstant moon appeared, for purposes of her own, to be on the other side of the house, and so he could see nothing at all. Tennyson's live soul in the Palace of Art was not more desolate. If he had seen a corpse of three months old which stood against the wall, he would have asked his way of it. The bloodhounds, bitch and puppy, considered that they were brought there to go to bed, and to bed they went with heavy sighs. It became obvious that he must pass the night there, unless he roused the house, which seemed a difficult thing to do, even if he had tried. He calculated that he had walked about a quarter of a mile through various apartments, and that he was that distance removed from human help. He resigned himself to despair and morning, when he saw a ghost.

A door opened at the end of the room, and a very beautiful young lady, in a white dressing-gown, came in. She carried a

light, and she peered about ; she went towards a writing-table, where there were pens, ink, and paper. There she wrote a note, which she closed and left on the table. She then exited, and all this time the foolish dogs had taken no notice at all.

Reginald fancied that she was a singularly real ghost, and when he was in darkness again bethought himself that he had really better move. How? There was a wax taper on the writing-table, and if he could light that he could get to his bedroom. He had cigar-lights, and felt his way to the table. The bloodhounds followed him.

He got hold of the taper, and struck a light. One went out, and he lit another. Lucifers were not then in their full perfection, and would ignite anywhere except on the box, to the confusion of insurance offices. He got the taper alight, and looked at the letter on the table. It was directed to himself. At this moment both the bloodhounds went mad with sudden, savage fury.

“Quiet, you fools !” said Reginald, opening the letter. Almost as he did so three things happened together. There was an explosion outside the window ; a crinkling smash of glass followed, and a bullet buried itself in the table before him. He put out the light, holding the letter in his hand. Then he ran to the window, keeping behind the mullion, and opened it. The hounds leapt out. There were two sharp shots in the shrubbery, and one smothered sound, half sob, half yell. The puppy came back through the window, cowed and whining ; the old bitch did not come back at all. She had tried to do her best, poor thing. In her stupid brain she had made out that Reginald was her new master, and she had died for him : she could do no more. “Poor dumb thing !” said Reginald to himself. “This is the only home she has ever known, and she has done the best for its master.”

He whistled, and called the dog by her name ; but she did not come. To go out to her help was death among these moon-bathed shrubberies. He knew what had happened.

He dared not show a light now, but keeping the puppy close to him, he groped his way from one room to another until at last he saw the fire in his own room still burning. The shutters were closed, and so he advanced with some sort of security. He lit the candle, and read the letter which the ghostly young lady had laid on the writing-table.

“SIR,—I am accidentally the inmate of your house, for I have come to see Mrs. Davies. I lay this letter on the table

which your steward uses, so that you may have it the first thing in the morning.

“I have just come from the rector very late, and have asked a bed from Mrs. Davies. I beg to inform you that the rector is much worse, and will not probably last over to-morrow; he says that he cannot die without seeing you. He will probably wake about eleven.—Your obedient servant,

LAURA OWTHTWAITE.”

So this was the business of the ghostly young lady. He slept in his chair, and so passed the first night in his new house. He began to believe that it was his now—not as a new home of pleasure and peace, but a place with a hundred new responsibilities. As for danger, he laughed at it. “They are utter idiots,” he said, “to attempt my life here. I don’t approve of the game laws, but I will double my gamekeepers for all that. I wonder if this last night’s attack comes from James Murdoch. What idiots they are, to be sure! they might have had me a dozen times over. Still, on second thoughts, it was not a bad idea following me down here and taking me by *surprise*. Still, they are fools; they won’t have very long to wait now. I must go and see after that poor dog in the morning.”

The dog was easily found. She lay dead among some dwarf rhododendrons and kalmias, and appeared to have died with scarcely a struggle. Reginald and his servant went out to look for her in the early morning, before the house was astir. Reginald bent over the poor faithful dog for an instant silently; then he said to his servant, “Let her be buried here, where she died for me.”

Then he rose and looked around, for the first time, at the outside of his new home, and stood dazed at its beauty. Sheets of smooth lawn, wildernesses of flowers, terraces, pools, shrubberies of rhododendrons and azaleas. Dominating everything, the vast square house of dull red stone, with long deep-set windows and endless gables. Climbing over all the house was a tangle of roses, mixed with jessamine, passion-flower, and cobæa. Around were great elm woods, above and beyond them downs, with here and there a grey limestone crag. Beyond, again, in the distance, mountains. A bright, clear river dashed forward past the grounds towards a cleft in the hill, through which you could see the sea. It was a place for a king! and at his feet lay the poor dead dog among the trampled flowers.

The gardener buried the dog where she lay, and Reginald went sadly back into the house. It was, as he had guessed in the dark,

a very splendid place. "It is a pity that I had not had it twenty years ago," he thought; "Charles would have enjoyed it."

After a hurried breakfast he went out again, and Mrs. Davies pointed out the way to the rectory. Past the stables he came to the home farm, among embowering elms; and there the little thirteenth-century church, a jewel of art, stood among fish-ponds, with the needle of a spire reflected in the water among floating lily pads. The carters and the farm boys were getting out their horses; a beautiful herd of Alderney cows was at one of the ponds. He asked a man to whom the deep-uddered kine belonged. He was told "to Squire Hetherage, the new squire." Yes, they were his, and he remembered that he had taken them in the valuation. He remembered also when he had had expostulations from the milkman in Brixton for not paying Charles's milk-bill.

Against the churchyard, where villagers lay thick as if for warmth—the interior of the church being reserved for Pierreponts: not in consequence of their superior godliness, but merely to show that they were not common clay—he found the rectory, a little replica of his own house, smothered in flowers of the rarest kind, planted and tended by some loving hand. A very old gardener was among them, and he spoke to him.

"You and I, friend," said Reginald, "should love flowers well; for we ought to know the lesson which they teach us. If we tend them well, they will reward us by their blooms; if we neglect them, they——"

Reginald stopped short. He had tried to make a pretty speech, and had failed entirely. The gardener, who, when he first began, had an animated expression, looked disappointed also. Reginald made a mental note that he would never try to speak extempore any more. Better than making fine speeches was to watch the old man gather a few of the choicest blooms as he led him up to the rectory door, and better than any high-flown nonsense of his own was the old man's remark—

"I am gathering these for him: he never cared for anything but his flowers and his parishioners. If you be going to see him, heft 'em and take 'em in to him."

The rector was so very much worse, that he might be said to be considerably better. All pain had ceased, and he was going to die. When Reginald was shown to his bedside, the sublime, statuesque beauty of death was nearly settled on his face. In a great number of cases nature makes a bargain with death, and restores for a short time to the face of the dying, and still more often to the face of the dead, the pristine beauty which has been lost for many years in the natural process of decay. It was so

here. The old man was perfectly sensible and very quiet. The calmness of the face and the brilliancy of the complexion were not surpassed by the beautiful face which was bending over him—the face of Miss Laura Owthwaite.

He knew who Hetherage was, and asked the young lady to withdraw. Then he prepared himself to speak at some length, but found the effort too great for him. He only said—

“Ask the new rector to keep Owthwaite, and be tender with the widow Austin. Don't let her go to the workhouse if you can help it. You must turn them out of the farm, but the son will make you a good gamekeeper, and might support his mother. I can say no more. Good-bye, and take care of my people—take care of Owthwaite above all.”

“I will, sir,” said Reginald, and then he went out and spoke to Miss Owthwaite. “I fear that he is dying,” he said.

“I fear so,” said the girl. “It is an awful loss for the parish. He was the brain, my father the hand. We must go now, for my father is determined on it. He has got the offer of a new curacy this morning and has accepted it. He could never work under another rector, and the people where we are going know him, and we shall be very happy.”

Reginald passed out into the sunshine, and went to his strange new home. The bailiff was ready for him, and so was the country attorney who acted as agent for the estate, and whom he had met in London. He dismissed the bailiff until the next day, but had a long talk with the agent.

The agent said, when he had seen the room in which the attempt on Reginald's life had taken place, “I should not put the county police on to the business, my dear sir. I should certainly communicate with the chief constable; but I would not make any hue and cry. Double the number of your gamekeepers if you like—I should say yes to that; but, believe me, this attempt will never be repeated if you make friends with the Haddensmouth people. It is the first time, is it not?”

“Why, no; it is the second,” said Reginald.

“H'm; that is certainly awkward. Could not some compromise be come to, which would make murder useless in your case? I mean such a compromise as would put a few thousand pounds into my pockets, you know. Several fortunes have been made out of the great law-suit; why should I not have my share?”

“Not to be thought of,” said Reginald. “Digby took uncommonly good care about that. Now to other matters: I suppose I must turn this widow Austin out?”

“ You see, you must. She is ruining the land, and she owes you £180 at this moment.”

“ Well, I must make the estate pay, and I will do my duty. Come back to dinner.”

A busy day. At one o'clock the bell tolled for the rector, and at two his servant announced “ Mr. Owthwaite.”

A tall, fine, up-standing man, with iron-grey hair close cropped to his well-shaped head—a man with a cheek as smooth as a boy's; of ruddy complexion, and a stern, lean, handsome face. Reginald asked him to be seated, and as he rose to do so, saw the reflection of his own face in a glass behind Mr. Owthwaite's head. He started; there was a great likeness between the two faces—the faces of two men who were not in the remotest degree connected, and whose lives had been so very different.

“ Our introduction to one another, sir,” said Mr. Owthwaite, “ comes at a very sad time. That is, however, of little consequence, because our acquaintance will be extremely short. I do not see that there is any need for what is called an acquaintance at all. We merely meet to fulfil our different duties. You have to do your duty in the sight of God by this estate; I have to do my duty by the poor.”

“ Exactly,” said Reginald, looking curiously at him.

“ I wish to put before you, Mr. Hetheridge, the case of the widow Austin. She is terribly in your debt, and I see no chance of her paying the money.”

“ Is she in debt elsewhere?” asked Reginald.

“ No,” said Mr. Owthwaite, “ not one farthing; I am careless: I mean that she owes nothing beyond her rent which I will not pay myself. Practically, her only debt is to you.”

“ My predecessor hinted at the fact. Has she any means of paying?”

“ I fear none. She must go, no one disputes that. But I want to keep her out of the workhouse, and if I could get any employment for the son, that could be managed. If I cannot, she must go to the house, and he must emigrate. That will break her heart.”

“ My heart was broken many long years ago, sir,” said Reginald; “ she will get used to it. Assure her, with my compliments, that it is nothing. Is she honest?”

“ She is a lady, sir, in every way worth mentioning, and her son is a noble young fellow. I see I have no hope; I might have known that there are natures in this world incapable of being changed either by poverty or wealth, by affliction or success. I suppose I can take my leave?”

“Can the woman say nothing for herself?” said Reginald. “I am asked to employ the son, and I have never seen him; I am asked to forgive the widow, and she sends a priest to bully me. Is that exactly fair? I say that it is not. I have had a great deal of bullying and ill-treatment in my life, but I never pleaded through a second person. Can I hear the woman’s own story?”

“She is without, sir. Shall I fetch her?”

“Do so,” said Reginald; and Mr. Owthwaite departed.

“That is a fine fellow,” said Reginald; “but I *will* be master. He would be too great a bully unless he was managed. Aunt Hester and Anders will be a match for him. Bother it! I must do it.”

Mr. Owthwaite returned, bringing in a fine-looking old lady, and an intelligent-looking young man, who stared with peculiar interest at Reginald, who was at the writing-table, with his papers and books before him.

“Well, madam,” he said, when she had sat down, “about this £180? It seems that it is your only debt, but that in four days you will owe me another £80. When I bought the estate I bought the debt with it, and so I wish to see my money, you know. I think you will allow that to be perfectly natural on my part. What do *you* think?”

“I have struggled hard, sir,” said the widow. “My son and I have done no injury to the land, sir; I appeal to Mr. Owthwaite, if we had the money to go on with we should be rich.”

“That is true, sir,” said Owthwaite.

“How did you get into this state of debt, ma’am?” asked Reginald.

“My poor husband was security for his brother, sir. Then he died.”

“The first proceeding was immoral, the second was probably involuntary,” said Reginald. “I think that the best way out of the business is this: I forgive you all arrears, including the £80 due next week. I will lend you a little money until harvest. You and your son had better keep the farm on. You see, you came to that farm when you were a bride, and your son was born there; I suppose, therefore, that you have some attachment to the place. I never had a home myself, but people who have say there is a great deal of weak sentimentality connected with such places. Keep the land in good heart, you know. Go away at once, please, for I am very busy, and I want to talk to Mr. Owthwaite.”

The widow Austin was so utterly stunned, that she looked at

her son speechless, and then bent down her head; she tried to thank him, but could not. The son looked at Reginald with flushing face and brightening eyes; he found it hard to speak also. At last he said, as he took his mother's arm—

“God will reward you for this somehow, sir!”

“My friend,” said Reginald, “I have long known that this world is not the place for rewards or punishments—that is a very idle fallacy. The highest reward which this world gave to the Son of God was crucifixion.”

They went away, and Owthwaite, with a wondering face, was left alone with Reginald.

“You have modified the opinions which have been attributed to you—the Talbots said that you were an Atheist.”

“Yes, rector, a man's foes are they of his own household.”

“What do you mean by ‘rector’?”

“Why, that you are Rector of Hollingscroft. Do you suppose that I would give the living to anybody else?”

There was a short pause, and then Owthwaite hid his face, saying, “Oh, my son! oh, my poor son!” and left the room hurriedly, in dead silence.

“And I thought he would have been so glad!” said Reginald. “It is a most disappointing world, after all.”

Miss Owthwaite was lying in wait to hear the result of the negotiation about the widow Austin. When she heard it in the housekeeper's room from her own lips, she clasped her hands with joy, and kissed the widow. She would have laughed aloud in her pleasure, but it was a day of death and change, and she was solemn and anxious. Suddenly her father came into the room, and said in his sternest voice, “He has made me rector; I shall not leave my people.”

Then she broke down, and began saying, “Oh, my brother! oh, my brother!”

Reginald got the story from Mrs. Davies. Owthwaite had been so very poor that he could not give his son a proper education. The son, a youth of promise, saw no possibility of living as a gentleman, and had enlisted in the 14th Light Dragoons, and was killed at Chillianwallah. Owthwaite's good fortune had come to him like Reginald's, when it was not worth so much as it might have been.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COUNTRY HOUSE.

REGINALD was now a country squire, in full possession of his own house and his own land, entirely determined that nothing should move the house from over his head, or the land from under his feet. He never for a moment dreamed of having his own way in his own house—he never had had—and he looked on any idea of the kind as a dangerous, and most probably unsuccessful, innovation. Had he ever entertained such a notion, the fallacy of it would have been driven out of his head at once by the arrival of Aunt Hester and Mary.

Aunt Hester moved in and took possession about six weeks after his arrival. In a short letter from Fitzroy Square she told him that, as he had never been able to take care of his own affairs, she was determined, in spite of her advanced age and settled habits, to come down and see after him permanently. She was not only coming herself, but was going to bring her furniture and servants. Reginald had no particular objection to the servants, but begged her to think twice about the furniture. She apparently thought twice about the furniture, for she sent it down, every stick, without saying another word, with strict orders that not a piece of it was to be placed until she came. It remained, therefore, in the back offices for a short time, for it came by railway; whereas Aunt Hester would not trust herself to one, but came down in her own carriage with four horses, as became her position. A deficiency of post-horses having arisen at Dorchester, she was horsed the last stage by the undertaker, and arrived with all the speed and dignity of a funeral.

She was extremely pleased with Reginald's purchase, and was pleased, in short, with everything except his having given away the living without consulting her. Mr. Othwaite was, from all accounts, by no means the man she liked; she had heard of him and his peremptory ways, and was most emphatically determined that he should not make a tool of Reginald. She rather disapproved of some of the arrangements in the grounds, and suggested alterations; but Reginald would not have any interference out of doors—within doors she might be mistress. He was so emphatic about this, that Aunt Hester was mindful about her old lesson on over-interference, and gave way; the fact being, when all was said and done, that *Mary* was the real mistress, without appearing to be. She always spoke to the servants of

Miss Simpson as being the lady who was to be first consulted in everything; and yet the servants knew perfectly well that Mary was mistress, and Aunt Hester let them know it also. Still, Aunt Hester had every wish consulted, and every whim flattered.

A day or two after her arrival, Aunt Hester sat down to dinner and declared herself tired out. "But I have arranged everything now, my dear Reginald," she said. "You must have the rooms in the east wing. That postern door will let you go out to your farm without troubling any one; your grooms can come to you there for their orders without making the whole house smell of the stable. The large room will serve you for your study and your justice-room—for I suppose that you will be in the commission of the peace now. In case of any prisoner being infectious, you can try him in the stable-yard. I am going to give Goodge the rooms over yours; of course, it is very inconvenient to him, my leaving London, but we must make the best of it for him. He must have upper rooms, because his specimens smell like unsuccessful mummies and would poison the house. We have broken one of his bottles in moving his collection, and there is a stench like a pest-house; but one must put up with such things for the sake of having a great scientific man like him in the house. Thank heaven, his cockatoo is dead of a shirt button, so you won't hear *him*—insolent brute! In my own house, when I only asked the bird how he found himself—such language to me indeed! The Duke and Duchess must have the ground-floor of the west wing; they had better have the whole of it assigned to them, for they will be here a good part of the year. I shall take the back of the house, with the little pleasure garden. The General will have three rooms on the first floor; and Mary is rather undecided at present. There will be plenty of room for all of us, without any crowding."

Reginald acquiesced, but put in a word.

"Where is the boy to go?"

"I never thought of that," said Aunt Hester.

"You must see that he has the best rooms in the house, Hester," said Reginald. "He is master here, you know;" and he said, almost to himself—

“‘To the tossed sea-boy in an hour so rude.’

And you seem to have made no provision for Hickson and his wife. They have no home but this, you know."

So there was a reconsidering of matters, and nearly every person of our little story was comfortably quartered on Reginald, permanently, and as a matter of course.

Not one word was said by Reginald about the bullet which had been fired at him to any of the women. It was known elsewhere, however; the fact was known perfectly well to young Austin, the farmer, though how he knew it is not certain. Reginald had, by a singular accident, been put on the same side of the house as that on which the accident had happened. He was sometimes uneasy about it, and often spoke to his servant on the matter, cautioning him not to mention it. He developed one or two tastes now which puzzled Aunt Hester and Mary. He filled the house with dogs, animals which Aunt Hester generally classed with those which had eaten Jezebel. She had the most tremendous detestation for them, but she had to overcome it; for Reginald was resolute on the matter, and told her that he was not going to have his throat cut in his bed to please her or any one else. She having brought all her plate down, rather fell into that way of looking at things, and, like a kind, generous soul as she was, took to the dogs, and what is more, got very fond of them.

There was plenty of game on the estate—a great deal too much, in spite of the poachers whom Sir James Jones had not prosecuted—and Reginald had no intention of increasing it. He puzzled his farmers about game matters, rather. When he first came he rode over to see his principal farmer, and looked over the farm. They came to a large swede field, and as Reginald led his horse through the gate he looked at the turnips.

“You are not much of a farmer,” he said. “Why, these swedes will be half rotten after the first frost—they are all vermin-bitten, even as early as this.”

“It is the hares and rabbits, sir. Look at them at the other end of the field”; and, speaking, the farmer sent his dog through the young swedes, and the place seemed brown with hares, while the grey rabbits went scuttling into a covert at the further end of the field by dozens.

“How much do these beasts cost you?”

“I don’t know, sir. I’d pay every labourer of mine two shillings a week more, and carters three, to get rid of them. But they are yours, not mine; I can’t touch them. Sir James Jones subtilt the shooting to a Londoner yearly, and left the power of keeping them to a moderate head out of *his* hands. Now it’s in yours.”

“I must have game to entertain my friends,” said Reginald.

“Certainly, sir,” said the farmer, whistling.

“But I will take you at your word; if you will see after the partridges and winged game for me, and make that increase in

the labourer's wages, I will give you over the whole of the ground game as your own."

"You *are* a gentleman!" said the farmer. "You know what is what, for a Londoner, sir."

"I have studied the question," said Reginald, "and written on it."

He had no reason to regret his decision; no man had a better head of beneficial partridge or half-harmless pheasants. The farmers and their better-paid labourers were his best gamekeepers; and yet he increased the number of idle young men, to look after the winged game—a strange perversity! A man could not walk at night in his plantations and coverts, for any purpose, without meeting a gamekeeper. The fisher-boys and their sisters from the bay could not stroll into the woods for a late bird's nest or an early blackberry without noticing the change.

The stream which ran through the grounds soon lost its bright, flashing habit, and began to sweep more slowly through the meadows, until, at one point, where there was a bridge, it was checked twice a day by the tide from the Channel. The estuary, pent in by the limestone hills, was proportionably as short as that of the Tweed, so that the place where the land-water lost its continued power was within easy hearing of the surf; and at the bridge, just at the end of the park, the fishing village began. The rib of low limestone hills, through a cleft of which the river found its way to the Channel, protected house and park from the sea wind, and the dense belts of timber were scarcely bent, save on the extreme south-western edge of them, where the south-west wind had power in spring. The red-sailed fishing-boats lay among nearly over-arching trees, and the deer would come down close to the silent face of the fisher-boy sleeping on a stowed sail, look on him, and withdraw once more into the thicket.

The harbour was nearly land-locked, and had in one part ten feet of water at low tide. The entrance was just wide enough to allow two or three boats abreast, and so well land-marked that the fishing-boats could make it with almost entire certainty during the day in all weathers, and at night the fisher folks on shore took extremely good care that lights should be shown as certain as those of the Trinity Board. Immediately all round the little village rose suddenly dense copse-woods and the rougher forest land of the park.

Gamekeepers have a strong objection to having their game disturbed, and country gentlemen, in the old times, who lived near the sea, were known to possess rather a prejudice than

otherwise against the excise duties. The Pierreponts had always entertained a strong repugnance for coast-guard in any form, and the consequence was that Haddensmouth was one of the most abominable little smuggling holes in England, as long as smuggling was worth while.

That great trade having been put a stop to, Haddensmouth found itself rather in Schedule A than otherwise. It had always produced a splendid, virtuous, moral, and extremely religious population. (When there was a large congregation in old times, the parson always knew, by the extreme devoutness of his flock, that a magnificent run was going on.) When the smuggling died away, and their honest bread was taken out of their mouths, the population very much deteriorated in every way, and became rather a sad set of blackguards for some time. They were, such as were left of them, rather on the mend now, and were producing a feeble kind of respectability, very different to the heroic virtues of their smuggling forefathers. Still, there were blackguards left among them, who had the traditions of the grand old times when gaugers and coast-guardmen had a singular facility for meeting with fatal accidents. Reginald Hetherege, after due inquiries, wished the place a great deal further. Young Austin told him plainly one day that there was a strange yacht in the harbour the night of his arrival, which had gone again the next morning.

If there was one thing Reginald had hitherto disbelieved in more than another, it was buccaneering sensationalism. He had always lived an orderly life, and he considered that every one else ought to do the same. He was of that singularly constituted mind which is continually in a state of holy horror and extreme astonishment at the commission of a great crime. It was at one time useless to point out to Reginald that great and fearful crimes were of everyday occurrence, far more common than great and sensational acts of virtue and generosity; you might point out to a man like him that precedents in the slave trade, the coolie trade, a shipwreck, or a railway accident were all extremely unlikely and improbable, and yet that they were occurring day after day—but they were in his newspaper, not under his eyes. He had never happened even to see a man run over in the street; and the only awful thing which had occurred in the family which had affected him was the death of Charles. Certainly, Mr. Murdoch's butler was hung, but that did not touch him nearly. He had now been warned twice; he *knew* that it was in the interest of some people—notoriously two—to put an end to his life; yet he never entirely realised the fact until he got this house over his head, and his first welcome to it was a bullet

through his window. He was absolutely certain that James Murdoch made a most utterly clumsy attempt to poison him, which, like most crimes of the kind, would have been almost certain of immediate detection. As James Murdoch had tried it once, why should he not try it again? But James Murdoch was older and wiser now, and he would certainly not act by his own hand. Reginald began to see that there was one man at least alive, an interminable rascal, whose crimes had been only against members of his own family, who was in the last degree likely to be prosecuted after so long an interval, and who would become rich by his death.

He therefore bought a yacht—which he never intended to use, but which might be useful for his guests—and manned her with five of the most amiable and clever, but possibly the most discontented, of the population of Haddensmouth. Conceiving then that he had taken all reasonable precautions, he laid himself out to enjoy himself, and see the best of life.

Reginald's original idea, that if he went into Parliament he should not know what to do when he got there, was singularly fulfilled. The first session he scarcely opened his mouth on any subject at all, and was not preternaturally brilliant when he did; his figures were extremely good, and he was listened to—but no more. Still it was generally considered by the affectionate clique which surrounded him, that he was an ornament to them all, and added dignity to the concern. They had persuaded him to go in, and so they were extremely proud when a letter came addressed to Reginald Hetheridge, Esq., M.P., Hollingscroft Hall, Dorset. These were often begging letters, but the effect was equally grand.

The general move on Hollingscroft took place in August, and then the house was full from garret to cellar—not with the very large number of people, but with the extraordinary amount of room which they took. Aunt Hester thought that she had provided ample room for every one, and that no fault could possibly be found with her arrangements. But Miss Emily Hickson objected to the apartments allotted to herself and her mother, because she could not see the cows being milked out of window while she was dressing. Her mother reasoned with her; but she said, "I don't care twopence. Miss Simpson has been arranging the rooms, and I am not going to be dictated to by *her*. If you have no proper pride, ma, I have; this house will be mine, and I intend to be mistress of it."

"My dear, you do not know what you are talking about."

"Ah! but I do, though; I am going to marry George, and

the house will be his, and therefore mine ; therefore I do know what I am talking about." In fact, this very emphatic little lady was the most difficult to please in the whole house.

However, they got settled down somehow, in a very pleasant way, because no one knew exactly who was mistress of the house, or who was master, and so they all did exactly as they chose, which was very delightful, and removed a vast deal of responsibility from the shoulders of the servants, who did very much what they pleased. General Anders took his natural position, as a military man, as master of the horse, and had in fact come down to Hollingscroft and attended to the details of carriages and horses for Reginald, who knew nothing whatever about the matter, was proud of the fact, and proved himself to be right by emptying Aunt Hester into a ditch while driving a cob which had previously been driven for several years by a decrepit bishop. After that he was not allowed to drive himself, *ipso aurigante*, but was handed over to the care of a groom.

The county came to call upon them—we should of course say Reginald, but we mean on the coterie. Sir Lipscombe Barnett, one of the greatest men in those parts, came first, with almost undignified haste. He had known Reginald in his adversity. He had seen him at the very worst of it, when his own son was frying sausages in the room with Mrs. Charles Hetherige—"Therefore," he argued, "I should be the very first man to take him by the hand under his altered circumstances, and show him that I fully feel what a true and real gentleman he remained through it all. George, you and I will ride over to-morrow."

George, now eight-and-twenty, and a captain in the Guards, acquiesced at once, as he did to everything which his father proposed—he holding before all comers that there never was such a gentleman in the land of England as his father, and that there never would be. We have seen the same delusion exist in the minds of other young gentlemen, whose fathers thought that the best of everything was not good enough for them, and who also thought that their sons were the finest fellows in the empire.

Sir Lipscombe had never for one instant tolerated that eminently reputable gentleman, Sir James Jones—he was not a gentleman ; Reginald was (in spite of the execution in the house and the sausages). If he had ever had anything to do with Alderman Jones, he would have patronised him. The idea of patronising Reginald never entered into his head. Reginald was a gentleman of vast ability, ruined for a time by an eccentric son of more ability even than his father. Reginald had been under obligations to him at one time, and the time was come

when, as an English gentleman, he ought to show that those obligations were utterly forgotten.

Sir Lipscombe was considered by some people in the county to be an ass; Goodge was of opinion that it was a pity there were not more asses like him.

Reginald was in the picture-gallery, which room was now adopted as the general camping-ground of the somewhat Arab tribe which surrounded him, when Sir Lipscombe and George were announced. There were present Aunt Hester, Mary Hetherage, Miss Emily Hickson, and Miss Owthwaite. It struck Reginald that Captain George Barnett and Miss Owthwaite had met before, because they made such an elaborate effort to appear utter strangers as would have attracted the attention of everybody, had everybody not had something better to think about.

“My dear old friend,” said Sir Lipscombe, “well met after so many years. My dear madam (to Mary), how can I ever forget our last meeting? I was deeply obliged to you on that occasion; I wish that I or George had some power of showing our gratitude. I cannot sometimes help laughing at the absurd trouble which my son gave me; and yet I do not like to laugh, because it was so soon before your great and irreparable bereavement. Alas! madam, I have known what *that* is; but I live in my son here, as you do in yours—and he is a fine fellow, madam.”

Here George came out like a lion, to the astonishment of his father, who gave him a new horse the next morning for it.

“The happiest days,” he said, “which I ever spent out of my father’s house were spent in the house of my old tutor, Charles Hetherage—your husband, Mrs. Hetherage; and I never received such gentle kindness, except from my own mother, as I did from you. I hope you will let me renew our acquaintance, or rather friendship, where it left off.”

George Barnett was not handsome, though the army had made his great person presentable. He looked so noble when he said this, and his face flushed so modestly and so naturally that the two young ladies in the room thought him extremely handsome.

Very few words had Mary and Reginald to say, for Sir Lipscombe left them no time.

“But George and I are talking of old times, when we should be anticipating new ones. I *think*—I almost dare to *hope*, that this may be the celebrated Miss Simpson. If you say that it is not, if you doom me to disappointment, I beg of you to tell me at once.”

It *was* the celebrated Miss Simpson; and he was presented.

“Ah, madam, we owe you a debt, a debt indeed. You are an

acquisition to this county—for, to tell the truth, we are sadly in want of talent here, and two such famous writers as yourself and my old friend, Reginald Hetherige, will brighten us up. I have never read one word of yours, or one word of his; it is extremely probable that I never shall. I have at present no intention of doing so; the opinions expressed by both, as I am given to understand, are totally divergent to my own: so why read them? Do I want my opinions unsettled at my time of life?—Far from it. Do you wish me to unsettle yours?”

Aunt Hester, who had no particular opinions, as far as any one ever found out, replied—

“Certainly not.”

“Then why, my dear madam, do geniuses like yourself, whose fame is in every one’s mouth, refuse the homage and respect of one who has no claims to your talents, but only begs humbly to admire, and still more humbly to disagree. I ask you, madam, are you right in this? My only claim is to disassociate myself from the common herd of flatterers and admirers who naturally throng round your footstool, and stand before you in my native form of an unbiassed but admiring man.”

On these terms Sir Lipscombe sat at Aunt Hester’s feet, and agreed with every word she said. Reginald and Mary joined in, and before half an hour they were on the most excellent of terms. The arrival of Mr. Owthwaite rather disturbed them, for Sir Lipscombe and that reverend gentleman were at daggers-drawn over the game laws, and Sir Lipscombe had expressed a pious wish to his son George, some days previously, that he hoped Hetherige would not commit suicide when he discovered what a pestilent viper he had put into the living. Miss Emily Hickson afterwards told her mother that, at the time when Mr. Owthwaite arrived, Miss Owthwaite was alone with Captain Barnett in the garden, and that they seemed very comfortable together.

Lord Snizort soon followed Sir Lipscombe Barnett, though he regarded it as a liberty on the part of Sir Lipscombe Barnett to have gone first. Lord Snizort had been raised to the peerage principally for his great wealth and high character for learning; he had, it is said, taken his title from the Skye parish, where he had no property, from very abstruse reasons. His arrival was of rather a singular character. The Duke, Reginald, and Goodge were in the hall with the ladies after lunch, when Reginald espied Lord Snizort driving up to the door.

“Save and preserve us!” he ejaculated, “there is that man.”

“What man?” said the other two.

“Lord Snizort,” answered Reginald; and the three men

looked at one another, and at once made an excited rush to a side door, which they closed behind them.

“This is too awful,” said Goodge. “We ought to have gone out; we can’t now.”

“When I was ill with fever at Vienna,” said the Duke, “I heard that he had arrived. I gave strict orders to my servant that he was not to be admitted, for that I should die if I saw him. My poor Louis, seeing me in a peaceful sleep, went out to get a mouthful of fresh air in the Prater. I woke up during his absence, and there was Snizort at my bedside, come to nurse me.”

Looks of sympathising horror from Reginald and Goodge.

“At first I thought that it was merely a hideous fantasy of my delirium; but no—some idiotic Kellner had been over-officious and let the beast in, and there he sat. With a vague idea of freedom I bounded out of bed and made for the dressing-room door. He was too quick for me; he seized me in his arms—I was as weak as a rat—and held me down in bed while he shouted for assistance. The whole house came swarming in, and there was the mischief to pay. My supposed delirium, however, as described by him in his lively voice, gave me an excellent opportunity for escape. I excitedly accused him of having attempted to murder me, and said that he was associated with a band of assassins. I reiterated this so strongly that the doctor requested him to withdraw, and afterwards Louis slept before the door.”

“There he is; hark to his sweet musical tones. ‘Lord and Lady Snizort!’ Why, the wretch has brought his wife!” said Goodge. “I wonder what *she* is like?”

Their heads were close to the door, but they were whispering too earnestly together to hear the footman’s approach; he, coming swiftly the way he had seen them disappear, threw the door wide open, almost upsetting them, and there they were face to face with the terrible Snizort himself, who, with one thumb in his arm-hole, his chest expanded, his bristly hair straight on end, his legs very wide apart, stood snorting fiercely in front of the door in all the fearful majesty of six feet two.

Beside him was Lady Snizort, a most awful lady with an enormous bonnet of 1834, gigot sleeves, a striking plaster-and-straw reticule, and an umbrella. When Lord Snizort left her among the Arabs at Damascus, while he explored the ruined cities of Bashan, she wore exactly the same dress. Aunt Hester, we have before remarked, stuck closely to the fashion of 1800, and was, with a slight inconsistency, glaring defiance at Lady Snizort for making such a ridiculous figure of herself.

To Lady Snizort there was but one man in the world worthy of any notice at all, and that was her husband; in intellect, in manners, in habit, she considered him perfect, and modelled herself on him as far as a mere inferior nature like hers could. Lord Snizort's powers of conversation she considered unequalled. They consisted of never leaving off talking unless for an instant at a time, just long enough to give his interlocutor time to say something, which he immediately contradicted. The consequence was that, as Lady Snizort formed her style of conversation on her husband's, neither of them practically ever left off talking at all; and the only difference between them was that Lord Snizort talked in a roar, and she in a screech.

Before the alarmed and guilty Reginald could make an attempt to look at his guest, Lord Snizort began—

“Welcome to Dorsetshire, Mr. Hetherege. Now, I know what you are going to say, and so I will save you the trouble of saying it, by flatly contradicting you and telling you that you are speaking without book. This place of yours is *not* damp. Yes, yes, my good sir, you may fidget and fume” (Reginald was doing neither), “but I tell you that I am right and you are wrong. Mr. Goodge, I think that you and I have met before, though not under the pleasantest circumstances.” Here he began talking in Arabic to Goodge, who answered him in that language, saying something which made Lord Snizort turn excessively red, and talk still more continuously in that language. The more his lordship talked, the more Goodge talked; and at last the conversation between them took the form of two never-ceasing statements, without one second's pause on either side. At the end it was obvious that neither was listening to the other, but that the Arabic conversation had degenerated into a talking match, in which Lord Snizort was losing wind (he lost his temper at first). This was very agreeable for the onlookers, for they had not the least idea of what it was all about. In the end Goodge, being in better training, won, and only stopped a good distance ahead of the learned nobleman, who remained his mortal enemy.

Meanwhile, Reginald had got out of it by laying himself at the feet of Lady Snizort, and introducing her to Aunt Hester, who chose to be on her very worst behaviour, and would do nothing but look fixedly at Lady Snizort's bonnet, after a formal bow, without saying one word. Her ladyship, however, nothing daunted, looked at Aunt Hester through an eye-glass, and started talking against time, as if she was anxious to run a good second to her husband. Seeing that Goodge had won, however, she left off; but not one word could be got out of Aunt Hester. Mary,

however, came to the rescue, and introduced herself as Mrs. Hetherege; whereupon Lady Snizort told her that her husband seemed a great deal older than she was, and that such matches were rarely successful. Upon this Aunt Hester rose and left the room, leaving Lady Snizort wondering what she meant by that. Mary had to explain that Reginald was not her husband, but her father-in-law; and Lady Snizort was excessively angry with him for it, and showed her just indignation by bridling and sniffing at him.

Miss Emily Hickson did not leave her long alone. "You have offended Aunt Hester," said that young lady, "and you should be very careful. She has been very much looked up to, and very properly, all her life, and she is not used to tag-rag and bob-tail." The eye-glass of Lady Snizort was at once turned on that dreadful young lady, without the remotest effect. Lady Snizort had not got precise orders from head-quarters as to her behaviour to these people—my lord had said that he would look at them first himself; so she declined battle, and said to Mary, "Is this lovely little girl yours," for instance. There were explanations, and Lady Snizort went off at score, and never stopped talking again until the visit was concluded.

Lord Snizort, having had the worst of it with Goodge, pursued the same policy, not being sure of his ground. He was afraid that Goodge might take it into his head to talk Hindostanee to him, in which language he was slightly deficient, but of which he knew Goodge was a perfect master. He therefore talked with the Duke, or rather to the Duke, and gave him a categorical account from memory of his having saved the Duke's life, at the risk of his own, when he tried to jump out of the window. Like most great talkers, he was a magnificent originator, and the Duke heard more about his illness than ever he did before.

At last the visit was over, Reginald scarcely having opened his lips. When Lord and Lady Snizort were seated in the carriage, my lord said—

"Those people will do. That fellow Hetherege is a very shrewd, clever fellow, with great powers of conversation—we must cultivate them. Goodge is an impertinent fellow—a very shallow man. Did you notice that he dared not talk English or Hindostanee with me? I should have smashed him if he had."

"That little girl Hickson seems intolerably vulgar and pert," said Lady Snizort; "and I fancy that Miss Simpson drinks—she has all the appearance of it."

"Oh, you know, if you come to that," said Lord Snizort, "you really must not be too particular about the manners of

such people as these ; they are mere yahoos, with the exception of Hetherage, who, I must say, judging from his conversation and his way of expressing himself, seems a thorough gentleman. If Miss Simpson does drink, it is no business of ours. General Anders—who, I regret to say, was not at home to-day, but for whom I left my card—is the sort of *preux chevalier* who is rapidly dying out. We must know these people ; I want to utilise both Hetherage and the General.”

And so Lord Snizort began talking very loud about one thing, and Lady Snizort began talking very loud about another. Neither of them left off for one second, and neither attended to a word the other said ; consequently, when they arrived home, they both said what a pleasant drive they had had, and what excellent company the other was. Above all, Lord Snizort was assured more than ever of the powers of conversation possessed by Reginald.

Many other people came—some exceedingly charming, unaffected people, some very tiresome and vulgar people ; but all were very kindly received. The visiting process was very soon over, and then the process of returning the visits had to be thought of. Nobody said that that subject was to be spoken of on a certain day at dinner, but everybody knew the fact perfectly well. General Anders had been in town, and no one wished to air their opinions thoroughly till he was present ; consequently, whatever might be thought about the various people, nothing was said, save from one to another of the household in groups of twos, or, at most, threes. To take an example, no one had ever got one word out of Aunt Hester about Lady Snizort : when that lady was mentioned, Aunt Hester at once took off her spectacles and was dumb. Even Emily Hickson did not dare to have a skirmish with her about Lady Snizort unsupported ; she waited for the field-day, when she could manœuvre her little regiment with support from some quarter or another. She knew that every one in the house was afraid of her except Aunt Hester, and she determined to frighten that lady herself—“Because,” she said to her mother, “I am not going, at my time of life, to stand Lady Snizort ; that would be a little too much. And I am not going in single-handed against the vulgar old trot ; the whole family shall back me and we will never allow her to enter the house again.”

General Anders began to look very old and anxious. Kind he had always been, but he seemed to get more and more anxious to be kinder ; the old General got more and more humble as time went on. The old jokes which he had loved seemed to pall upon

him ; the old music seemed to jar on his ear, or to fall dead upon it. He never seemed older, more anxious, or more distraught than he did on the day when he came back to Hollingscroft, and was welcomed by all of them.

He was very quiet before dinner, and after dinner opened the subject of their neighbours himself.

“And who has called ?” he asked generally.

“The Barnetts,” said Aunt Hester.

“Very nice people, I dare say,” said the General ; “he is rather a bore, is he not ? I don’t know him.”

“He is very nice,” said Emily, looking straight at Laura Owthwaite (it may here be mentioned that Mr. Owthwaite and his daughter were now of the family group), “and I am in love with him. He is ugly, but not vulgar, and I like him. I always have fought him on the subject of his son, and I always shall.”

“Never mind them,” said the General ; “who are the next people ?”

Many people were mentioned. He took little or no notice of any of them—he passed them by. Some he knew, and some he did not. Then there was a dead lock in the conversation ; nobody would bell the cat about the Snizorts, for they knew they were acquaintances of his. At last he said—

“I am sorry the Snizorts have not called.”

“They *have*,” said Goodge.

“I hope you liked them,” said the General.

There was a general silence, broken by Emily Hickson.

“Nasty impertinent vulgar things !—no, we do not like them at all ! they are absolutely unbearable. Their manners are not fit for the society of costermongers or chimney-sweeps. I don’t care about his rank or hers, but they are snobs, utter and entire snobs, and as long as I am in this house they don’t enter it with my consent.”

“Emily !” said her mother, “if you speak in that way, I must request you to leave the room.”

“I am all obedience,” said Emily, “but before I go I should like the General to hear you elders repeat *to* the General what you have said about them among yourselves. They have no consideration for other people’s feelings, and think of no one but themselves ; and so *I* say that they are snobs. I will take my dessert in my room, as I am not fit company for my own mother ;” and so she bounced out of the room.

“I am not sorry that our dear little girl is gone,” said the General, “but I wish to speak to you about these Snizorts. Have they been very disagreeable ? Speak, Hester,”

“The woman,” said Aunt Hester, with a radiant smile, “is very good indeed. She is a great study; she is the best fun I have seen for years. I refused emphatically to speak to her, turned my back on her, and walked out of the room—since which time no member of our circle has dared twice to mention the woman’s name in my ears.”

Here there was a sudden reappearance of Miss Emily Hickson, who said, “I’d have said the same, but no one would have backed me up.” It set them all laughing and at ease, and Reginald caught the young lady and brought her back to her seat.

“Well, now, look here,” said the General. “I know these two people are very disagreeable, but I am very anxious that you should be civil to them. Goodge, you know *him*?”

“Well,” said Goodge.

“Let us all let him talk. The man is utterly unendurable, I will allow that; but he is very clever, very honest, and, I fairly tell you, very necessary to us. I want his voice in the House of Lords.”

“But, General,” said the Duke, “do you know the man well? With his never-ceasing twaddle, he spoils every cause he takes up, however good it may be. I will speak more fully when the ladies are gone.”

“Then we had better go,” said Aunt Hester, “if there is money in it. Come along, my dears. If you put Lady Snizort on business grounds, I will stop my ears with cotton, and smile as I used to when I was young and handsome. You remember me like that, Reginald?”

“Not a bit,” said Reginald, flipping her with his napkin. “I never remember you being as handsome as you are now. Go along!” And so the men were left alone.

We have noticed above that Miss Owthwaite was present; Mr. Owthwaite also was very frequently a guest at Reginald’s table, but hardly ever spoke unless he had a brother clergyman to speak to. He used to say grace, and then eat his dinner. He had instituted an evening service at eight o’clock for the labourers, and so, dinner being at seven, or generally half-past, he used to slip away, perform service, and take his daughter home in the evening. On this occasion, dinner being late, and it being a Friday, he had left after the fish. He returned, however, as the ladies left the room, and was generally welcomed. He took some wine and sat perfectly silent, while the men began to talk. We must remember the fact that there were only four men besides himself.

“Now that we are alone,” said the General, “I want very

much to say that if my dear friend Hetherige does not object, I wish very much that these fantastic people, the Snizorts, should be treated with every civility, and humoured to the top of their bent—fooled to the top of their bent if you like; there is money to be made out of that blatant ass, and we must make it.”

“I am in the scheme then,” said the Duke, laughing. “He shall bleed for putting me back into bed.”

“How are you going to make money out of him?” said Goodge. “He is the greatest screw on earth: he is much more careful of his money than you ever were, General.”

“That man was Senior Optime at Cambridge, and he is as good a surveyor as you are, Goodge. That man knows every foot of the Euphrates Valley, as well as I do the valley of the Thames. That man has Arabic at his fingers’ ends, and has talked with the natives on their own ground. That man is well disposed towards our railway, and would speak with authority in the House of Lords, which no one could dispute. Reginald here will do our business in the House of Commons; if we get the right side of that man he will do it in the Lords.”

“But,” said Reginald, “this is the first I have ever heard about the Euphrates Valley scheme. It can’t succeed yet. We should not pay a dividend for fifty years.”

“We’ll post you up,” said the General; “I want to get hold of this man. Theodorides proposed to me to try him, but I pointed out to Theodorides that he was inexorably honest. Theodorides, who is in reality a Simpson, you know, and a Yankee, thought that we might try him, but he must be talked over. We can surely do that.

Reginald was eating a peach, and Goodge was looking at the eager General with deep pain. There was another man looking at the group with a very different expression.

“I will talk to you about this to-morrow morning, General,” said Reginald, rather sadly.

“Not to-morrow morning, Mr. Hetherige,” said a deep voice which electrified them all. “Now, sir, now! Do not truckle or evade for a moment, sir, on your soul. I am commissioned by my Master to speak, and when I hear his voice, as I heard it just now, I will not be silent. I would not be silent if I stood face to face with Nero. This is a scheme to make money by raising shares to a fictitious price, and then letting the unfortunate shareholders take care of themselves. I protest against it as dishonest. General Anders has covered himself with well-earned glory; he has seen stricken fields and the flight of widows and orphans from villages, which it has been necessary to burn

in the awful course of war. In his old age, with more money than would rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem, he still seeks to make more. Satiated with the lust of honour, he panders to a meaner lust, that of gain, which in a few short years will be useless to him. Never mind who suffers, General Anders must have more money. In the name of my Master, for what? In the name of my Master I protest against it, and I leave you."

And so he went away, and they sat staring at one another in silence. Reginald and Goodge were very sorry about this sudden explosion of Mr. Owthwaite's, for they could easily have persuaded the General into another course; they could have reasoned gently and affectionately with him, but Mr. Owthwaite had done more harm than good it seemed at first. The Duke, with all the carelessness of a Frenchman, was in no whit disconcerted, and he spoke first, which was a considerable relief to the others.

"Well, I see," he said, "that we must hold to my old rule—never talk business before a woman or a priest. Bless them both, they are too good for this world! But now the women and the priests are all out of the way, and the lodge is safely tiled, I should like to ask the assembled company what any or all of them know of this man Theodorides. I have important reasons for asking, and I am so earnest about the matter that I must ask that the question of Lord Snizort is deferred for the present."

Goodge said afterwards that he could have kissed him. The General was sitting scowling and deadly pale, when this pleasant Frenchman, with singular dexterity, put them all at their ease at once. The General was extremely angry, and this question gave him an excellent opportunity for being irritable about a small matter instead of about a great one. He was on the Duke at once, to every one's great satisfaction.

"What do you want to know about the man?" he said abruptly.

"Who is he, my friend?" said the Duke eagerly, delighted to draw the irritation on his own good-natured head. "I want to know who he is, and what character you have got with him, for I believe that he is no other than that young forger Simpson come to light again."

"There you are utterly wrong," said Goodge. "I know who the man is perfectly well. I knew that young Simpson, and I know this man. They are two distinct people. This man is some connection of the American Simpsons, but he is a grandson of old Theodorides at Panama. They are distinct people. Why, surely his own brother would know him!"

"I should not know my own brother if he had committed

forgery," said the Duke; "and I firmly believe that this is the man."

"Would you like to attach a perfectly unsustained condemnation against any other of my friends, Duke?" said the General. "Perhaps Mr. Hetheridge is a murderer; or my friend, Mr. Goodge, a coiner. Upon my soul, I am deeply obliged to you."

"So you ought to be, for warning you against a skulking rogue," said the Duke. "That man is at no good at all, I tell you. I suppose you know that he is on the most intimate terms with Bevan."

"I introduced them, sir."

"When?"

"Last week."

"Well, to my certain knowledge they have been as thick as thieves this three months. I met them arm in arm in St. James's Street, certainly all that time ago. Do you mean to say that they shammed not knowing one another?"

"Sir, I will not sit here and listen to you, while you take away the character of my friends. I say that Count Theodorides and Mr. Bevan are both gentlemen of high honour. Mr. Bevan is one of the greatest merchants in America, a member of the State Legislation of New Jersey; a most eminent man; his knowledge of both American and Australian finance is incomparable. I really think that I will go upstairs, for, after being called a rogue, I am not exactly prepared to be called a fool;" and so he went.

"He rides rusty under it," said Goodge. "I am very glad of that."

"So am I. He is changing very much," said Reginald, shaking his head.

"We can all see that," said Goodge. "What is the reason of it, in Heaven's name? I cannot bear to see it. He sometimes seems as though he would do anything for money."

"He has not fully confided to me. There is something behind it all. I suspect that there is some secret. You know where I mean, Duke?"

"Oh, nonsense, there is nothing there. Don't you begin to craze yourself over that nonsense. If ever that room is opened, I suspect that you will find a number of extremely disreputable love-letters. The old man fancied that every one cared about his affairs as much as he did himself."

"No, there is something more than that," said Goodge. "His moral nature is deteriorating with this insatiable thirst for money. We must talk to him, or rather you must. Don't let that son of

thunder—that rector of yours—pitch into him. He won't stand it at all."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REGINALD'S OLD LUCK BEGINS TO RETURN.

A SECRET mistake, a secret fault, confessed at once, remedied at once, is as harmless as a trifling slide of snow from a roof-top, which falls over the playing children's heads in the court, and makes them laugh. But a secret mistake, kept in one solitary bosom, grows, as year after year goes on, into a potential avalanche, which is a continually increasing source of terror to the man who keeps it and who knows of the existence of the vast snowdrift overhead. A man with a great secret, kept for years concealed, says every year, as time goes on, "I cannot solve it now; it is too late." Every year it becomes more impossible to speak, until at last the great secret is only discovered by death or by accident.

The dark, sealed room at Bolton Row was General Anders's secret, and as the years passed he was more and more unwilling to open that room. Our readers know already the conditions made by the old merchant as to its being opened. Had he done after Vittoria what he might have done, he would have known the worst. Nothing could induce him to face that solitary fact. He had reason to believe that there were documents there relating to the mother whom he had never known. The morbid fear of knowing more about her than was consistent with her honour grew on him; and at last warped his judgment, nay, even his moral feeling. The awful words written on the paper which he had actually shown to his old fellow-soldier were bad enough; but, as we have said before, there was more than he had spoken of.

His fellow-soldier was dead, and he was alone in his own counsel. He had seen the effect of money in the world, and he determined to have money. Knowing only one-half the truth, he thought that he knew all. It matters little here what he knew or did not know, that will be seen hereafter; but he thought that he must have money to a very vast extent. He took Reginald into his confidence as far as that. Reginald said that they had money enough; General Anders said that he was in ignorance about contingencies, and that he considered that they would want at least a million,

Reginald wondered, but he knew afterwards that the General intended a great legal campaign about the Digby will. This intention was mixed up with such an obliquity of moral vision as astounded Reginald utterly. Affairs afterwards explained themselves: for a time General Anders, brooding over one theme, did not know right from wrong. It is not a very uncommon case, nor is superstitious cowardice so very uncommon among the bravest men that we should condemn him entirely.

He was very angry with Mr. Owthwaite, and went away. But all his going away could not prevent Reginald from beginning to reciprocate the hospitalities of the county; and he considered that the arrival of Mr. Bevan, the great American financier, was the proper opportunity for a grand banquet or dinner. Goodge, when he heard of it, remembered that he had a particular appointment in Patagonia, but his clothes and dressing things were removed from his room until he consented to stay.

It took a week to consider who was to be asked first. Reginald wrote down the Barnetts, the Snizorts, the Owthwaites, Mr. Bevan, and Emily Hickson.

Every one except Reginald was dead against the Owthwaites being asked, but Reginald insisted on it, and it was carried.

Aunt Hester then desired it to be known that, if Emily Hickson dined at table, she requested to have her dinner in her own room; whereupon Emily said that she had much better do so.

The eminent and aged novelist looked at that young lady with the most withering scorn, and as if she were going to say something.

"Ah, you are thinking about what you are going to say," said Miss Hickson. "Come, say it out if you are ready with it, and don't keep us all waiting. You say that if I dine at table you won't; well, as I am going to dine at table, I am glad to hear it."

"Emily!" said Mrs. Hickson, setting her mouth at her daughter. "Silence!"

"Don't screw your mouth about, ma, as if you were feeling for your wisdom teeth. You would be as beautiful as Aunt Hester if you did not make faces at me. But I have done. Don't be angry with me for being naughty, for I am not really so, you know. I won't dine at table at all. I shall be certain to say something to Lady Snizort: I had much better not."

She was therefore left an open question. Then, *nem. con.*, came the Barnetts. The list was subsequently agreed upon to the amount of thirty, including the people in the house. Such as

are worthy of notice will be introduced to the reader in the course of the entertainment.

People not used to giving dinners or entertainments of any kind are generally fussy, and make their guests as little at ease as they are themselves. You ought to attend to your guests certainly, but only in an indirect manner; you ought to put everything in order for them to enjoy themselves, and then leave it alone, or to your servants. If you cannot give a properly ordered dinner party, why, then the remedy is perfectly easy—that is, not to give one at all; but ask a few friends to a leg of mutton, they will enjoy themselves far more. Reginald and Hester had no trouble about their guests. They had a trained *stolos* of servants, and were utterly careless of details. Hester was used to grand entertainment, and had given her advice; Mary had followed it, and seen to everything. Reginald had told Mary that she must not appear to know that anything particular was going on, and was to try to look as if they dined in that way every day of their lives. He himself was utterly careless about the whole matter, and so he awaited his guests with perfect equanimity; although he was quite aware that one-half of his guests were, politically speaking, deadly enemies to the other half, and that there was a fearful family feud between the Snizorts and the Barnetts about the right of way through a wood. Mr. Bevan had arrived, and Reginald had seen him for a moment, after which he had gone upstairs to dress.

The first arrivals were the Owthwaites. Laura Owthwaite looked exceedingly pale and anxious, and Mr. Owthwaite dangerously calm. There was something extremely uncomfortable in that quarter—Reginald did not know what in any way. He had comforted himself with the assurance that everybody was prepared to quarrel with everybody else, and that he would have to bear the blame. He was so used to this state of things ever since he was born, that he did not particularly care. Goodge, too, was there, that marvellous man, who, by good humour, shrewdness, and tact, could manage any one, from a Nile slave-dealer to Aunt Hester. No one of his friends minded anything when Goodge was by their side.

The next arrival was Mr. Bevan from upstairs. He was a fine-looking man, with an enormous jet-black beard and blue spectacles. He was extremely agreeable, but he spoke with a fearful Yankee accent and expression, and about nothing in this world but America and American doings and habits. He was presented to Aunt Hester, who was very gracious indeed. Poor lady!

To say that he talked exactly like Artemus Ward, would be to

deceive our readers ; he not only talked like Artemus Ward, but ten times worse. Goodge was very much interested in him at once ; he entered into conversation with him, and seemed to take to him. Aunt Hester was rather puzzled by some of his expressions, and Goodge said to him—

“ Miss Simpson has never been out of England, and does not quite understand some of your Australianisms.”

“ My Americanisms, I fear you mean,” said Mr. Bevan ; “ for, as we say in the States, I will take my colonial oath that I never was in Australia in my life.”

Goodge had a little more conversation with him, and then went to Reginald.

“ Reginald,” he said, “ mind that fellow Bevan. He is not an American at all, he is nothing but a whitewashed Yankee of very recent date. He is an Australian, shamming Yankee—fancy an American gentleman saying ‘ my colonial oath ! ’ That fellow is a thundering liar.”

Reginald smiled ; but there was no time to do anything else, for the butler announced “ Sir Lipscombe Barnett,” and at the same time, but with a second’s pause, “ Lord and Lady Snizort.”

Here was a pretty kettle of fish ! Here was a nice beginning ! The butler had better have been in his grave than have done such a thing as to announce Sir Lipscombe before Lord Snizort. It was all over now, and Reginald, with a glance at Goodge, resigned himself for an evening’s amusement, knowing that the whole awful miscarriage would, as usual, be laid at his door. Some people would have tried to mend matters by an exhibition of that peculiarly shallow humbug called “ tact ” ; Reginald knew that a man or woman who exhibits “ tact,” when both parties concerned in a misunderstanding are perfectly well aware of all circumstances, only makes an enemy of both parties, and is set down as a cowardly enemy by both. Reginald let the matter arrange itself, and spoke to Sir Lipscombe first, shortly and warmly, after which he passed on to the infuriated Snizort and his lady. The horror generally inflicted on society by this very worthy and learned couple arose from the fact that, when either of them was set talking, they neither could be got to leave off again any more. On this occasion, for the first and last time, they inflicted a new and more terrible horror on our unfortunate friends. Neither of them would utter a single word, or do anything except follow Sir Lipscombe Barnett about the room with a stony and baleful stare coming out of their four eyes. It was horrible. The first visible effect of it was to make Laura Owth-

waite, who had been extremely ill and nervous before, rise and leave the room hurriedly.

Sir Lipscombe was in high feather, most genial and charming. Having exchanged a good-humoured bow with Lord Snizort, he sat by Aunt Hester and made himself entirely agreeable. Mary went to assist Reginald in the apparently hopeless task of appeasing the Snizorts; but the Duke and Duchess joined Aunt Hester and Sir Lipscombe. Sir Lipscombe told them that he had at last read one of Aunt Hester's novels; he was utterly and entirely converted to her way of thinking on all points. He had been prepared to disagree, from what he had heard at second hand; but her story of "Jessie" had caused him to throw over all preconceived opinions, and frankly and humbly lay his palinode at her feet, as he did now. Aunt Hester, not being classical, glanced towards her footstool, and then saw that he spoke metaphorically. In short, Sir Lipscombe, with his kind-hearted truthfulness, made himself extremely agreeable; while Lord Snizort, with more than all his brains, and fifty times his knowledge, was, assisted by his wife, making himself a vast nuisance.

As the guests came, however, they gathered about Lord Snizort more than about Sir Lipscombe. They were mostly important county squires, and Snizort was a great man among them. Bevan shone out prodigiously; even Snizort's airs were nothing to his; his railway company had a concession of land half as big as Ireland, which you had only to scratch with a plough to produce thirty bushels an acre of wheat. Round the Snizort lighthouse all craft came to an anchor, and listened to the wonderful American as he spoke, aye, and spoke almost truly, as regarded fact, of the great nation of the future.

"We ain't no better 'n other folks, I reckon," he said, "but we've got the experience of other nations heaped up; and we've got the richest inheritance that ever God Almighty sent to any nation. Guess we mean to hold it and improve it. We air the richest nation on the face of the earth."

A man had joined the group whom no one had noticed—a powerful, tall, pale, and ugly man; if every one had not been so eager they might have heard him announced as Lord Arthur Sebright.

"What, are you here, Bevan, raising the wind?" said his lordship; and then dinner was announced before any one had time to notice that Bevan seemed not only surprised, but, on the whole, sorry that Lord Arthur was there. It is possible, however, that blue spectacles and a black beard are calculated to conceal emotion; for Goodge never saw any.

The Duke took down Lady Snizort, Lord Snizort Aunt Hester, Reginald a squire, and Goodge Mrs. Hickson. Beyond this there was no preconcerted arrangement; Mary made a few attempts at order, but the people arranged themselves. The child, Emily Hickson, who had come down very late, and who looked very pretty, went quickly up to Lord Arthur Sebright, and put her hand on his arm. "I want to speak to you," she whispered anxiously.

Lord Arthur was pleased with the pretty little spoilt girl, and invited her confidence. It was of the most alarming character, but was not given until Mr. Owthwaite had said grace.

Grace before meat, in the hands of a justly exasperated man, is a very powerful engine of offence. We have seen previously how Aunt Hester, by merely reading aloud the formularies of the Church of England, which are carefully prepared so as to give as little offence as possible, could nevertheless, by the mere use of emphasis, launch poisoned arrows of sarcasm and rebuke at her servant's heads. The sermon, of course, allows of greater latitude than any formalised liturgy, and we have seen how the late Charles Hetherige used to ease his mind in a sermon by denouncing, in the strongest biblical language, people who were not in the least degree aware that he was preaching, and could by no means ever become aware of a single word which he said. The pulpit is a splendid vehicle for denunciation; but then the remedy, or counter, always remains. If the denounced one does not happen to go to church, the personal allusions to him fall rather dead—much as do the personal denunciations of any man in a public journal which he never casts eyes on from one year's end to another. From Grace before meat, however, there is no escape; you may, and many do, make fifty excuses for not going to church, but it takes all your time to excuse yourself from going to dinner. When you are there, the parson has you, if he is clever enough. Mr. Owthwaite was quite clever enough to make himself a skeleton at Reginald's banquet, and he did it. He was asked, as the Scotch say, to "bless the victual," and he did it like Boileau's priest.

He prayed shortly that vain, causeless, and frivolous quarrels might cease between the rich and the powerful of this world (this meant Snizort and Barnett). He hoped that those who had newly acquired wealth would not be puffed up by it, but would remember the fatherless and the widow while enjoying the bounties spread before them (this was for Reginald); and he also hoped that none of the assembled guests would ever feel

the bitterness of rebellious and unthankful children (this was a cut at his daughter); after which whet to the appetite he sat down.

Then Emily began whispering to Lord Arthur Sebright.

"You are a great friend of George Barnett's?"

"Yes; I have no such friend."

"And I want to be a great friend of Laura Owthwaite's."

"Well?"

"I shall not say one word if you speak to me like that. You know what I allude to; you—but you men are so mean."

"Now, let us be friends. I am not mean at all; but don't you see, my dear young lady, that I am responsible for every word I say, whereas you are not."

"There is a good deal in that, and I will trust you. You know that they are in love with one another."

"I really cannot commit myself in any way."

"Then I must do it all myself," said Emily. "I suppose you are right; but let me tell my story. They are—you need not contradict me—desperately in love with one another. The thing has been going on long before we came here, secretly, but she has told me, because I saw—well, because I saw them together the first day the Barnetts came to call. Mr. Owthwaite's son enlisted in the army, and he has some terrible prejudice against it. He has said often that he would curse his daughter if she married a soldier, and you know what he is. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe are at daggers-drawn about Mr. Owthwaite's Radicalism. He says nothing better of him than that he is a rick-burner, without the courage to fire the match. This love for Laura is the only thing which George has concealed from his father, who would forgive him anything except an imprudent marriage. He means him to marry Lady Jane Dove, with a million or so of money. It is all arranged as far as the old people are concerned, but George *hates* her. Mr. Owthwaite has discovered it, and has been furious with her to-day. I believe that Reginald might make peace in some way, because he always does so; no one can resist him. Now, I want you to use your influence with George not to——"

"Well?"

"Not to press her. I am frightened about her. She has used very wild words to me about your friend. Her father has been very bitter with her; I am sure that you will do your best to keep Mr. Owthwaite and George Barnett apart. Persuade him to go back to his regiment—to go to London for a time to be out of her way. I am sure that it will all end happily then."

“Allow me to observe, my dear young lady,” said Lord Arthur, “that you are at once very indiscreet in trusting so much to a mere stranger like myself, and yet extremely sensible at the same time. I will speak to the young lady herself, if you wish me, after dinner. I know her well, and I promise that George shall behave with the most entire discretion. Where is Miss Owthwaite? I do not see her at the other side of the table.”

“She must be sitting this side, I suppose. I left her in my room, and she said she was coming down. Where is Miss Owthwaite?” she whispered to the butler, when he came round again.

“Miss Owthwaite is gone home, Miss,” said he, “very poorly.”

“I wonder why George did not come to-night,” said Lord Arthur. “Now Miss Hickson, we are so deep in one another’s confidence through your indiscretion, that we must make acquaintance. What do you like most?”

“My dinner just now.”

“What do you dislike most?”

“The ridiculous conventionalisms which would have rendered it impossible for me to say what I have just said to you about two good people, unless I had a will of my own.”

“Do you like me?”

“Immensely. They say that you are a prig, you know, and perhaps you are. But I like you very much indeed.”

So they made friends in their way, and their frank friendship lasted, because they could laugh at one another without anger or temper.

Meanwhile the grand banquet proceeded with very indifferent results in other quarters. As it was the first, so it was the most disastrous and the last of all the general banquets which Reginald ever gave. Lord Snizort would not talk to a human being except Bevan, save to contradict flatly. He was only civil to Bevan because he was a foreigner; and that gentleman reciprocated his advances so very warmly that before dinner was half over he had been invited to stay at Lord Snizort’s as soon as ever he had finished his visit to Reginald’s. He accepted it with great pleasure, and my lord called down the table to Reginald—

“I hope that you will not keep Mr. Bevan too long, Mr. Hetherige. He has promised to come to me, immediately after leaving you; and as his visit is timed to exactly fit a promised visit from your friend General Anders, it will be an admirable thing to make two such great financiers known to one another.”

“That fellow has played his cards devilish well to get the General alone in a country house. He means no good,” muttered Goodge. And Reginald wished that the General was going anywhere else, for he had a painful feeling that he had in some way lost a friend, and that his old General was dead.

Politics took a very violent turn. There was only one very highly talented Tory there, Lord Arthur, and he was taken up with Emily, Goodge, and Reginald. So the Tories made up in denunciation what they wanted in argument. Lord Snizort was a famous Whig, and had a more intelligent following than could be found in the disorganised ranks of the enemy. The consequences were extremely unpleasant, and every one was glad when dinner was over. Then came the memorable disaster which lost Reginald a dear friend, and did so much to embitter the peace he should have found in his new home.

Belgium is the cockpit of Europe. She certainly escaped last time, but by all accounts the Belgians expect that the next war between Germany and France will be settled in their corn and turnip fields. Why should Belgium or Reginald Hetheridge's house be always selected for the theatres of wars, dynastic and family, with which they have nothing to do? Nobody, except such men as Napoleon the First, who could fight anywhere, ever goes and fights out an extraneous quarrel in Switzerland—by no means a powerful state. There must be a fatality over some nations like Belgium, and some individuals like Reginald Hetheridge, which makes them the natural prey of war. An affair had been quietly going on for some time between the houses of Barnett and Othwaite; it now culminated, and the principle parties, with an unerring instinct, selected Reginald's unfortunate house for the *dénouement*. He knew nothing of it, and had nothing to do with it; but his neutral fields, so to speak, were the first to be desolated, and the first shock of war fell on his devoted head.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

REGINALD'S MISFORTUNES ACCUMULATE.

MR. OTHWAITE had left the dinner table without being noticed, for he came and went in that house like a shadow. The men

were still at wine, when the butler came in and quietly called out Reginald and Sir Lipscombe.

They went into the library at the butler's desire, and there they found Mr. Owthwaite, white as a sheet, and looking wild and dangerous.

"Mr. Hetherege," he said, "the sanctity of your house has been violated by this man's son."

Reginald at first thought that Mr. Owthwaite, for the first time in his life, had been taking too much wine, but he soon unfortunately found that Mr. Owthwaite was perfectly sober.

"My daughter has been here very much lately, Mr. Hetherege. She has been very much in the companionship of Mr. George Barnett here. I think you will allow that."

"They have certainly both been here very often," said Reginald.

"With your knowledge, Sir Lipscombe?" demanded Mr. Owthwaite.

"I suppose that I am above being a spy upon my son, sir. He is an officer in her Majesty's army, and is not responsible for his coming and going to any one save the military authorities."

"He is a scoundrel, sir," said Mr. Owthwaite.

"Your cloth protects you, sir," said Sir Lipscombe. "Go on."

"If my son were alive," said Mr. Owthwaite——

"If *your* son were alive, sir, *my* son would castigate him in the public streets, sir, or call him to account in another way, a way which, as a Christian, I will not mention," said Sir Lipscombe.

"I am the most unlucky man on the face of the earth," said Reginald. "I shall have no peace but in the grave. Will you two tell me what has happened, and not stand snorting defiance at one another."

"My daughter has eloped from your house with Captain Barnett, sir."

"Is that all?" said the unlucky Reginald. "Well, I hope they will be happy. They are a handsome couple."

They were both down on him at once. Sir Lipscombe began before Mr. Owthwaite had time.

"How dare you speak of my son's dishonour with such disgusting levity, sir! I ask, how you dare do it! My son, my only son, the soul of honour and probity, began his moral deterioration in your son's house, and has completed his ruin in yours. I wish that I had never heard your name, sir. Was it not enough that my son should be sent into scenes which he had never previously contemplated, save in novels—the scenes, I mean, which went on in your son's house at Brixton—but he must

be trepanned here, sir, to break my heart? He has had everything he wanted from a boy; he has been everything that a father could wish except on one occasion, when pressure was brought to bear on Lord Hardinge not to force him to sell out. Mr. Owthwaite, to show you how guiltless I am in this matter, let me tell you that I had a splendid match in prospect for him. Let us cast the dust off our feet, sir, as we leave this house, and mourn our mutual and irreparable loss in secrecy and shame."

Mr. Owthwaite had not the smallest intention of mourning in secret with Sir Lipscombe, until he had had an interview with Reginald.

"My child—my ewe lamb," he said, "was allowed to come and go to this unhallowed house without suspicion, without inquiry. Always the best of daughters to me, we mourned together in secret over the loss of my only son. Never, until she made the acquaintance of Miss Emily Hickson, did one word of rebellion ever pass her lips. Since then she has been different. She has defied me on more than one occasion; she has now crowned her defiance by this act. We have parted, and I am alone for the rest of my life."

"What are the details of this affair?" asked Reginald.

Both Sir Lipscombe and Mr. Owthwaite laughed sardonically, and looked at one another as much as to say, "You hear this fellow."

"I should have thought that you knew more about it than we did," said Owthwaite.

"I should have thought so also," said Sir Lipscombe. "But you had better tell him, and indeed I have some remote curiosity about the matter myself."

"Oh, it is very simple. She was last seen with Miss Emily Hickson, and was supposed to be lying down in her bedroom. She went downstairs, and was seen to ask one of your servants, Sir Lipscombe, to see her across to the rectory. The man was your son's creature. Half-way there she was met by him and another of your servants, and they are away together. It is all over."

Goodge had privately followed Reginald and the baronet out, and had sat down in the room in the dark; he now spoke out of the darkness.

"And what are you two gentlemen going to do?" said Goodge. "You have made a thundering mess of it between you. Sir Lipscombe, you had no right to force your son's inclinations. Mr. Owthwaite, you should have been more tender to your daughter."

“You are laying down the law, sir,” said Sir Lipscombe.

“I am, sir. I am speaking for my friend, your son. I have been fearful of this for some time; but here is Lord Arthur Sebright, whom I asked to follow me. Let him speak for his friend also.”

“I am exceedingly angry,” said Lord Arthur, “at George having taken such a step without consulting me. I would have done anything to prevent it. He has done it in self-defence against a father whom he worships as an idol, and whose good will and affection he calculates on as a certainty, as I do myself; but meanwhile he has put the future Lady Barnett, the mother of your grandchildren, the possessors of your wealth, in a false and absurd position. It follows that both you and I are extremely angry. We shall both get over it.”

“And what are my feelings?” said Mr. Owthwaite.

“I don’t know what they are,” said Goodge, exasperated by the treatment which Reginald had undergone. “I should say that you suffered remorse for not having put the matter fairly before Sir Lipscombe the moment you knew of it. You must certainly have known of it for a long time. You may sniff, sir, but you won’t sniff *that* away. Is your daughter’s happiness to be sacrificed because you quarrel with Sir Lipscombe about the game laws?”

It looked as if the allied powers were winning, and that the two fathers would go away without a victim, which would be a great pity and extremely provoking. Reginald, however, was there ready decorated for the altar, as he had been all his life. They were not going to depart without their prey. The most sensible plan would have been to renew their violent quarrel with one another, for which there were strong grounds; but they were both, having quarrelled off and on for the last ten years without either having gained an inch, slightly afraid of one another. As neither of them cared about a fight, and as they must pitch into somebody, they renewed their attack on the perfectly inoffensive Reginald. They would listen to Goodge or Lord Arthur on any other subject in the world, in fact they listened to a great deal in the hall, when they were leaving, from both those gentlemen. But one demanded, and the other backed him up in his demand, that the name of Mr. Reginald Hetheridge was never mentioned to either of them again. The thing was done, and they would try to make the best of it. Both fathers agreed that it had been concerted in Mr. Hetheridge’s house, by his connivance and that of Miss Hickson. They repeated the request that their names might never be spoken in their hearing.

It was made obvious to the county that Reginald, Mary, Aunt Hester, Miss Hickson, and Miss Hickson's mother (who had some sympathy for having such a wicked daughter), had behaved most shamefully. Every one who loved Sir Lipscombe (nearly all the nicest people in the county) wondered what on earth could have induced him to take up with such strange people after what he had known of them in old times. The worthy baronet in his anger let out the story about the execution in the house and the discovery of his son, and the greater part of the county would have nothing to do with them. The Duke and Duchess, as distinguished foreigners, and General Anders, as a man of great mark, were considered exceptions; but Reginald and the rest of his belongings got most emphatic cold shoulder.

He would really have been glad, as far as he was concerned, to have been left alone. But now that Sir Lipscombe Barnett had violently quarrelled with him, he naturally and at once became the dearest bosom friend of Lord and Lady Snizort. They never were out of the house now; the ghastly saw of one or other of their estimable voices was in the house every day. Lord Snizort insulted everybody about Reginald, and pleaded his cause with such persistency and long-wordedness that Reginald's popularity became about as great as his own. Previously, when society was unaware what subject his lordship would choose for conversation, Lord Snizort had been a great nuisance. Now, when everybody knew that he was going to talk about Reginald's wrongs for an hour without leaving off, he was a greater one than ever. All his battles in Reginald's favour were reported in full by him and his lady at Hollingscroft; and Aunt Hester said at last, in confidence with Reginald and Mary, that if something did not happen to those two horrors, it would become a question between suicide and emigration.

In fact there seemed a fate against Reginald's being, in the common sense of the word, happy. But even Goodge did not pity him, for he said, "You may be sorry, vexed, disappointed, but your temper will always prevent you from being really unhappy. You will be the happiest of us all, Reginald, when all is said and done. Still you are the most unfortunate man ever born. Why were you? You have always been told that it was a mistake."

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN WHICH WE FOLLOW THE HEIR.

A SUDDEN though extremely natural change—a change for which we hope our readers have been wishing, from the extremely stormy sea on which Reginald found himself launched to the Pacific Ocean, may not be unacceptable. To the Pacific Ocean, however, we must undoubtedly go, having left matters in that quarter of her Majesty's dominion to take care of themselves quite long enough.

Peace being within our walls, and prosperity within our palaces; Acre having been demolished, and the Pritchard affair settled, there was nothing very particular for her Majesty's ships to do except to cruise. This they did diligently: an exhibition of order and beauty at every port at which they touched. None of our cruisers attracted more attention, or was received with greater applause, than the frigate commanded by Captain Hickson, C.B. He occasionally got orders to go somewhere, and he went at once; the sweet little Admiralty cherub aloft giving him his orders, and he obeying them as a British sailor should. He kept his ship, his sailors, and his officers, in the most perfect state.

A question having arisen about the existence of some islands south of Campbell Islands, he got orders to go south and explore. He found the Macquarie Islands and the Emerald Islands, as he was bound to do. But finding nothing remarkable except ice in 62° south, he headed north again for New Zealand, to await fresh orders to do nothing with all the diligence in his power, and the might of the British Empire at his back.

They had been now more than four months in that desolate southern sea—so little known then, so familiar now—when he turned his head northward. The weary blinding ice was still all around them, but the wind was fair, and civilisation was not far. The crew and officers were in high spirits—there was a chance of shore at all events; and the midshipmen began discussing what they would have for dinner.

One morning, as the rising sun smote the highest crag of a neighbouring iceberg and made it shine like silver, a large ship appeared from behind it, and crossed their path. It was H.M.S. *Beacon*. A boat was alongside of her in a quarter of an hour. In an hour all the news had been interchanged, and was known all over the ship. The *Beacon* had been sent to look for Captain

Hickson's ship, and he had orders to proceed immediately to Sydney.

In two hours more she was away northward, with the *Beacon* far astern. Every wind from the bitter south seemed to follow and drive the good ship racing through the cold cruel sea. Even Hickson, not given to relenting into a joke, save with his best trusted officers, said that the hotel keepers in Pitt Street had got hold of the tow-rope.

Sydney! the sailors' paradise of those times, what extraordinary service had Hickson done to get such luck? Sydney was enjoyed ten times over before they were within five hundred miles of it. A few on board had seen it, but very few; they were for a time important personages. It was a most amazing place by all accounts, where the pigs were fed on peaches, and grapes and pomegranates grew in the street. The mere word "Sydney" roused up the whole crew.

A likely and beautiful country when they sighted it one evening with the setting sun blazing behind the forest-crowned peak of Cape Howe, and the ship was becalmed within five miles of land. The men got into the rigging to look at the land, of which so many of them had heard, and where so many of them were to lay their bones, when the weary tossing and tumbling at sea was over for ever. The approach to all the east coast of Australia is dull and solemn, though the first navigators were terrified at it, and said that it was possessed by devils. But it is a kindly-looking coast for all that, and is tenderly loved by those who know the peace, silence, and beauty of the creek and river side beyond the mountain forests, which look a little forbidding to the mariner approaching from the south-east.

Two midshipmen were together by a gun, with their arms entwined, talking quietly together.

"A pretty country," said the tallest of them. "When I quit the service I will come and see it in my yacht; it is not half examined yet."

"When you quit the service!" said the other; "but you always said you would never do that."

"I am getting sick of it. I might do better under another captain, but he is so cold and repulsive to me. I get the hardest work, even when it is not my turn. I get everything except one word of praise. I went overboard after that jolly, and held him up for twenty minutes: what did he say to me? He said, 'You are very wet, sir, and had better get dry, for if you come on your watch with those clothes you will have the rheumatism.' That is pretty encouragement."

“I don't think he likes you,” said the other midshipman. “I would sooner go to sea with the devil than with my uncle.”

“Uncle! he is no relation of mine. I wish he was. I am head of a great family, and if he was my uncle he would treat me differently. But the strange thing is this: on shore he is the finest fellow you ever met. I came to sea partly because I—well, don't laugh at me—adored him. And he treats me like this. It is too hard; I am sick of it all—utterly sick of it.”

There was a little more talk, during which the younger midshipman tried to comfort the elder. Then the captain's steward was heard inquiring for Mr. Hetherege.

“Here he is,” said George, the taller midshipman, turning round. “Now, mark my words, Barton, this is to prevent my going ashore, as he did at Tahiti.”

George followed the steward into the captain's cabin. Captain Hickson had got his lamp lighted and was writing. He pointed to a seat.

George Hetherege sat down and the captain went on writing. At last he said, “I am writing home a letter to be posted at Sydney.”

“I hope you will try to say the best of me, sir,” said the lad, with a choking voice. “Before God, I have tried to do my best, sir; I have indeed. I know you don't like me, but you need not tell them so. I thought that you liked me very much, and I came on board with you so full of hope. And I was so very fond of you, sir. I know I can't do right, but it is not for want of trying; I'll go on trying if you will tell them at home that I am not an entire failure. Pray say that I tried, sir.”

“There spoke your own grandfather,” said Captain Hickson. “Reginald himself all over. Whatever goes wrong it is his fault; he has no powers of self-assertion, no powers of self-defence, when he knows he is in the right. These Hethereges are born to go to the wall. Non-success for four generations has ingrained the habit of self-depreciation into their very blood. If you were to kick a Hetherege he would give you a terrible thrashing and humbly apologise for doing so afterwards. Come here, my boy.”

George went to him, and the captain put his hand on his shoulder.

“I always had a strong personal feeling towards you. You come of one of the most perfectly amiable families which ever existed. But there is a terrible fault in that family, that of weak self-depreciation. Your ancestor William caused you to inherit a vast estate by his mere honesty and self-assertion; since then the quality seems to have died out of the family. Your grandfather,

in spite of all his wealth, is a perfect tool in the hands of Goodge and Aunt Hester, but fortunately honest people. Of your father I say little, except that he was far weaker than your grandfather. I saw this quality, self-depreciation, existing in you, and I have tried to correct it. You know what friends we were on shore—who knows it better than you do? We have been strangers at sea, have we not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I wanted to try you. I was a little in hopes that you would have protested against my treatment of you; but you have done nothing of the kind. I only like you better for that. You are as God made you, a gentle biddable creature, incapable of a lie, incapable of a mean action; and yet, with that singular instinct of obedience, knowing so strangely how to command.”

“To command, sir!”

“Aye. I have not a better officer in my ship. I am writing home to our people to tell them so. I am mentioning you to the Admiralty. Let the farce be done with, my boy, and let us be as we were on shore.”

George turned his face on his. “Are you my old friend again, as I knew you on shore?”

“Aye, every inch of it, and ten times more so. Never doubt it,” said Hickson.

“How could you have kept up the farce so cruelly and so long then? For nearly two years I have been in this misery. Would you not have broken your heart over it?”

“I am not a Hetherège,” said Hickson. “The Hicksons have temper; the Hetherèges none. I have treated you very hardly, and possibly not wisely, my boy. It is all over between us now, and we are friendly for ever.”

The officers on the quarter-deck were rather surprised to see the despised midshipman Hetherège sitting and talking earnestly and affectionately with the captain that night. A junior officer ventilated the theory that the *Beacon* had brought news of Hetherège having come into his property. But that idea was scouted at once, because if one thing was more certain than another, it was that Hickson hated having a man independent of the service on board his ship. The theory of George's friend was much better, that the captain was forced at last to confess that the much-bullied Hetherège was one of the best officers of his years. That was the theory accepted, and Captain Hickson was rather surprised at the extraordinary geniality of his officers the next day. They were always most friendly, but as they were sliding along under the coast they were more than that, they were

genial. He attributed it to the approach to Sydney. But his first lieutenant told him the truth—that it was his new kindness to the most popular youngster in the ship was the cause.

He walked up and down the deck a few times, and then he came back to his first lieutenant, and said—

“Do you know, Lamb, our officers are a devilish good set of fellows.”

“That is their opinion about you,” said the lieutenant. “What made you try the boy so hard?”

“I wanted to see whether he was worth it,” said Captain Hickson. “Mind your own business. There is the Sydney head-light on the lee bow. Now for Sydney, old fellow.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SYDNEY.

It is not to be supposed that the arrival of a man-of-war at the great port of Sydney creates half so much sensation in these days, when Sydney is one-fourth larger, and when the colonists have ships of their own, as it did in 1847. The arrival of such a fine ship was a great sensation; salutes were exchanged with the two other ships there, and the names of all the officers were published in the papers next morning.

Visits were at once interchanged with the other ships: and then the most hospitable of cities in the Pacific surpassed herself; balls and picnics took place nearly every day, and both soldiers and civilians vied with one another in giving the blue-jackets a most hearty welcome.

Crowds of new faces passed so very quickly over the eye that many were forgotten almost as soon as seen, and the whirl of new scenes and new amusements was so great that George was quite confused, and more than once made the mistake of calling people by their wrong names, which was amusing to the people, but a source of overwhelming confusion to the young gentleman himself, he being of an extremely modest and retiring disposition. But a week had not passed when he began to think that he saw one face oftener and in a greater variety of places than any other. At first he thought that it was fancy, but at last he was perfectly sure of it. An amiable-looking old man, with a very full complexion and

rather stout, certainly met him in a great many strange places, though he never addressed him. The old man was dressed in well-made clothes, such as a gentleman would wear, white trousers and waistcoat, and a maize-coloured coat, with an expensive Panama hat. Somehow, in spite of his good clothes and his heavy watch-chain, George came to the conclusion that he was not a gentleman.

Yet he attracted his curiosity. He was in the theatre, in the bar-room, in the billiard-room, in the church, in Pitt Street, on the Quay, in the Domain, but never at any private house, or at any entertainment where the officers of George's ship were invited. He asked a few of his Sydney acquaintances who the old gentleman was, but none of them had noticed him or knew anything about him.

One morning, riding ten miles from the town, he met him on a very beautiful horse, which he seemed unable to manage. He seemed so extremely disturbed and nervous that George, who was of an obliging disposition, and very much attached to the society of old people, proffered his assistance, which was at once thankfully accepted, and words for the first time passed between them.

"I am getting old, sir," he said, in a very cheerful voice, "and my nerve is not quite what it was. I remember the time when I could have tried conclusions with this fellow, but that time is gone by."

George held his horse while he dismounted, and then the old gentleman said that he would walk home. "It is only three miles," he said, "and although I am lame I can manage it in time. I will cut a tea-stick at the next creek, and I daresay I shall get along."

"Oh, I can't hear of such a thing as that!" said the good-natured George. "You ride my horse—he is quiet enough—and I will ride yours. I am not a bit afraid of him."

"No, really," said the old gentleman, "from a perfect stranger I could not think ——. You are too good."

"Don't mention it. Pray get on my horse at once, and I will soon manage yours." They were mounted directly, and started along a side road amidst a profusion of thanks from the old gentleman. George found the horse to be the most docile and easy-tempered beast he had ever been on, the very thing for an old gentleman. He wondered at this, until he thought, "I suppose it is because the horse's head is turned homewards." He was surprised that he should not have seen this; it of course never entered his head that the old gentleman had expressly got up the

whole scene for the purpose of making acquaintance with him, and had at last succeeded in doing what was very difficult for a man like himself, not known in Sydney society, to do—had got on speaking terms with an officer in the Royal Navy.

The road wound very pleasantly under over-arching trees, the sandy track being bounded on each side by fern and heath. Sometimes there was a pretty clearing, fenced with posts and rails, which were concealed by towering hedges of scarlet geranium, a wonder to George. Each wooden farmhouse stood in a wilderness of flowers, while the orchards consisted, not of apple and pear trees, but of peach and orange. The summer air was faint with scents of all kinds, partly European, certainly, but overwhelmed by the rich aromatic smell of the bush, which in addition to scent emitted sound in the shape of large insects and the pleasant whistling of parrots, or rather parakeets. They came to a small town, with a little church and court-house, where the young men were playing at cricket; then they came down to a pleasant river, bubbling over stones now, in the summer, but spanned with a noble wooden bridge thirty feet above its level, which was so built, George's companion told him, to provide against the winter floods. The old gentleman's conversation was very interesting and agreeable, and George liked him more and more. He knew more of the interior of the country and of the strange life and ways there than any of his aristocratic acquaintances in the town, some few of whom, at all events, had, George thought, the fault of being "genteel," a very sad fault, never committed by a gentleman. They rode on until at a smaller river they saw a charming little stone house in a nook among gently sloping heights, which came down to the stream. The wooden verandah surrounding it was nearly as large as the house itself, and had one *spécialité*, which took George's sailor-boy fancy immensely. On the roof of the verandah had been planted water-melons, which had rambled clean over the highest ridge of the house, covering it and hiding it from sight with a mass of broad leaves, yellow flowers, and enormous green fruit. He had never seen such a garden on the housetop before, and seldom such a garden as there was on the ground, covering the earth with gaudy masses of colour; and climbing up the pillars of the verandah, there were creepers of all kinds to mix with the water-melons on the roof.

"That is the house *I* should like to live in," said George.

"It is at your disposal, sir," said the old gentleman, "for it is mine. I am sure that you will not have come almost to the door without coming in."

“I should very much like to see it. I should like to come in very much.”

“Will you do me the favour to eat an early dinner with me and ride back to Sydney in the cool of the evening?”

“Well——” said George.

“I am delighted at your consent, sir; I do not know what there will be, for I was not expected back; I was to have had dinner in Sydney (this, singularly enough, was perfectly true), but I dare say my wife and her daughter Ada will make us comfortable. Here is my groom, who will take our horses. Will you walk in the garden while I go in and prepare them?”

George did so, and made friends with a colly dog; but his eye caught his host after he had entered a room out of the verandah, and he distinctly saw him take down a picture, and move three or four books from the centre table. Then he had a look at his faultless boots and knee-breeches, and wondered if any one could possibly take him for a sailor; and felt extremely conceited, when he saw a very pretty girl indeed coming down the garden walk towards him. He at once shotted his guns and went into action; that is to say, into a grand flirtation.

The young lady gave him no trouble at all; she was not in the least degree “arch” or shy; she had no petty whims or tyrannies of any kind. She was very singularly well-dressed in her *déjàgé* style, and she knew that also. She looked at George once, with one of those lazy southern looks out of her large dark eyes, which says at once “Do come and make love to me to pass away the time, it is too hot for anything else,” and George immediately reciprocated, with a sailor’s will for that sort of pastime, almost before she had time to lower the sleepy lids over those two liquid violet orbits which had for one moment met his own.

He had met with a delightful adventure, and he determined, boy-like, to follow it up. The old gentleman was rather a long time in seeing after domestic matters; but George was not in the slightest hurry. Once or twice there were distinct sounds of oburgation from a female voice in the house, and George set it down to a trifling difficulty with some of the convict servants. It was a pity, he thought, that such a lovely and charming young lady should ever be exposed to such sounds. It was a great pity, certainly, seeing that the foulest mouth in the whole kitchen was that of her own mother, the celebrated lady coiner.

Of course, he had never dreamt for an instant that he had got into very queer hands indeed. It never struck him that the old gentleman wished to gain his confidence, and that the girl was used for the purpose. Had he made the most diligent inquiries

in Sydney about the old gentleman, he would not have heard a word to his disadvantage, further than this—he had married a successful convict woman. Had he told any of his new Sydney friends how he had passed the afternoon, they would have done nothing more than tell him that fellows older than himself were very careful not to get too thick with Miss Ada Honey, for her father notoriously wanted to marry the poor girl above her station, and would most certainly bring any man to book who gave him the chance. There was not one breath against the girl's character in any way; she was a very good girl, but would most certainly marry the first gentleman who would ask her; and she would have a very nice penny of money.

We are obliged to explain this, though George knew nothing of it, and after he had found this fairy bower hardly talked about the matter at all, thinking that he would keep a good thing to himself. He was only a boy of little more than seventeen, and was of a privileged age, when a lad may play fast and loose with any woman. Had he mentioned the matter at all, men a little older would have said that they would be glad to be in his place, but they dare not be.

We are keeping him standing in the garden rather long, however agreeably employed. After a time the lady-mother came out in full dress, a very fine woman, and extremely lady-like in her manner. George never from the first gave the old gentleman the credit of being a gentleman, but from the very first he thought that his wife was a thorough lady. Having been a first-class lady's-maid for many years before the time of her transportation at about thirty-three, she was so lady-like as to take in a well-bred lad like George Hetherege.

The dinner was very good; the mistress of the house had been still-room maid first, then kitchen maid, before her personal attractions had caused her to be moved to the position of lady's-maid; so she not only knew what good eating and drinking was, but she knew how to produce it. George had certainly lighted on his legs.

The afternoon passed most agreeably, and he was pleased in every way. What with the agreeable company of the young lady and her saint-like mamma, the day slipped on so that he had to ride like mad into Sydney, to get on board his ship in proper time. He tumbled into the last of his ship's boats in a great hurry, and next morning asked for five days' leave.

"I expect that we shall sail as soon as the *Torch* comes in," said Captain Hickson. "Where do you want to go?"

"A gentleman I have met in the bush, sir, tells me that he can show me some fine kangaroo hunting only forty miles south."

“ Well, I have no objection,” said Hickson. “ Yes ; you and your messmate may go if you like. I suppose you want leave for a messmate as well—put a name to him.”

“ The invitation only extends to myself, sir.”

“ Oh, indeed ! A flirtation—and so Claridge is too good-looking to go with you, eh ! She is very pretty, no doubt, and old enough to be your mother. The service is going to the devil. Here is a boy of seventeen giving himself the airs of a man, and being jealous of a boy of fifteen. You can go, but mind, five days—and five only.”

George blushed and laughed, and went over the side, leaving the name of his new acquaintance with Captain Hickson. Captain Hickson took that address to the club that same afternoon, and inquired about it of an eminent police magistrate. The results were not satisfactory. The old gentleman, Mr. Clumber, had come from no one knew where, but was tolerably rich, and he had married a distinguished convict woman, long emancipated, who had been a leading dressmaker in Pitt Street. The girl was her daughter, not his. There was nothing whatever against the girl—in fact, everything in her favour. She had been well educated, and was very careful in her conduct. If it were not for her mother, many ladies would take the girl up out of pity. The boy could get no harm there at all : if he wanted a spree in the bush he might go to fifty worse places. On the whole, the police magistrate thought that he, mere boy as he was, was much better there than knocking about in Sydney. Still it was not satisfactory, and Hickson was uneasy.

He would have been more so had he heard the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Clumber after George's departure.

“ What are you going to do now you have got him ? ” said Mrs. Clumber.

“ I don't know,” said Clumber.

“ It is perfectly obvious,” said Mrs. Clumber, “ that it is not the slightest use attempting to get him to promise marriage to Ada. He is a mere child, though he looks like a man.”

“ He has fallen in love with her,” said the husband.

“ Yes,” said the worthy lady ; “ but as I tell you again, he is a child ; and he must be on board ship in a week.”

“ Suppose we stopped that. Suppose we got him away just too long, until he was afraid and ashamed to go back. Did you see that I asked him to get five days' leave to come kangaroo hunting ? ”

“ That was very clever, my dear love. You are the cleverest man I ever knew, and so clever as this, that you are not above

taking the advice of a woman like myself, with half your brains. But even suppose that you forced him to miss his ship, what follows?"

"In a year and a half he would be old enough to marry her; and then things would be square."

"After Reginald's death," said the lady. "He is not at all old as yet. Haven't we cross-examined the cub this very afternoon? Don't we know that Reginald is good for eighty, and after that silly attempt by that ass Simpson, of which we heard underground, he is surrounded by gamekeepers. Just let me put the case before you, my dear old man, and listen patiently. At Reginald's death there will be a settlement, and this boy will be rich. Well and good; others will be rich with him—among others, Simpson and James Murdoch: at least, so say the lawyers, and so they believe. Supposing the boy to die, what then? Follow me. There would certainly be a settlement at Reginald's death; on which, according to the advice which Simpson and James Murdoch have, they will be ten times richer in case of the boy's death. The Hetherige line ends with this boy. Simpson tried to put Reginald out of the way once, as James Murdoch did once, to gain a settlement, and bring about a compromise with the family, who would never trouble either of them now, for very shame's sake. Let Reginald be for a time; your power gains tenfold by this boy's death."

"But, my dear——"

"But, your dear! What was your first plan: to attract the boy by throwing Ada in his way, and then follow him to England with her, keeping him to his bargain. It looked very well; but I thought that the boy was much older. Say that you had succeeded. We should have had her Mrs. Hetherige, the wife of the great heir. But it can't succeed; the boy is not old enough to let it succeed. Captain Hickson would find out enough here to blow upon me, and render it impossible. Do you see, old man, that it would *not* do?"

"I am afraid you are right, old girl," said the worthy Mr. Clumber. "I thought that I had made it out all square—but a woman against the world."

Mrs. Clumber kissed him. "Now listen to me all over again. If anything were to happen to this boy—I leave alone anything happening to Reginald—how do we stand? Why our secret is worth ten times more to Simpson and James Murdoch than it was before. I would not take less than thirty thousand pounds for it."

“No, my love; I don’t suppose that it would be worth less than that. Still, as it stands, it is worth a good deal, and, one way or another, I must go to England and see after it.”

“Where did you put it?” said the lady.

“Thank you, my dear, I would rather not tell you. I have seen you in that hysterical temper with the servants that you would let out anything; and I think, on the whole, that you had better trust it to me.”

He did not look at Mrs. Clumber’s countenance, because he had no curiosity. He was perfectly aware that she looked at him as if she would like to murder him; it was an expression in which that lady so often indulged that he did not care, one way or another, to see it again.

“I will leave it to you, if you like,” she said sweetly; but if anything was to happen to you, you might be sorry not to have told me.”

Mr. Clumber, having often thought over the extreme probability of something happening to him if he ever *did* part with the secret of his heart to the wife of his bosom, said only, “Will you further unveil your plans, my love; I am all attention?”

“You have got the boy, and find him only a boy, not fit for your plan. He has got five days’ absence. Make him overstay it; there is plenty of scrub to the south where you can trust him for days, for weeks, for months—for ever. Then, when the thing has blown over, go to London, sift what you know of, and make your bargain.”

“Did it ever strike you, my love, that I might make a bargain with Reginald?”

“No; Reginald is too honest; you can’t do anything with an honest man—no sensible being ever could.”

“Or General Anders?” said Clumber.

“No; confound him, he is honest too. You must not try him.”

“And did you propose, my dear, that I should put this youth out of the way by my own hand?”

“I do not go so far as that. I think that you have eaten the bread of his family so long, that it would not be respectable.” Here she rose and swept her silk skirt along the floor with the air of a Marquise Brinvilliers, or a lady much more familiar to us, the agreeable and charming Mrs. Manning. “I can manage all that part of the matter without troubling you.”

“Then, if you did not mind, my dear, I think that I will leave it with you,” said Mr. Clumber; and the lady departed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

GEORGE was back at Mr. Clumber's house soon after ten. He had left the ship by the first boat, with a hurried farewell to Captain Hickson, and a promise to be punctually back from his leave. He had some wild idea that he might want money, and so he put a bill for fifty pounds in his pocket; he was in such a hurry to see the house of the flowers and the agreeable young lady again that he cared for no breakfast, but trusted to getting it on shore. As the boat pushed off, he gave a look at the dear old ship, in which he had learnt so much, and suffered not a little.

“The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat.”

He felt that he loved the old ship dearly, but more dearly than her the man who stood upon her quarter-deck—the man who had done him the compliment of trying him so hardly, and who had done him the high honour of telling him that he had been more than worthy of his trial. The boy left the ship with his heart beating wild with new hopes, new thoughts and ambitions, all to be told to the beautiful girl who was his friend, before the sun was high. He was not a handsome fellow, but the bare-necked, bare-breasted sailors at the oars could not help but notice that the most popular youngster in the ship looked more gay and pleasant than ever.

The bank was open early in that hot weather, and he got his bill cashed. Then he got his breakfast at the hotel, and ordered the horse which he had hired during the stay of the ship: for he was always in funds—the richest of his messmates. Then he dressed himself carefully in the best costume of the country, and rode away through the suburbs to his pleasant new acquaintances who lived among the flowers in the aromatic forest.

According to the rules of a certain kind of high art, he ought to have ridden over a black snake in the grass, as a warning not to go on. Aunt Hester, in her style of art, would most certainly have done so, and would either have made him turn back and be saved, or proceed to his destruction. We no more pretend to emulate Aunt Hester's genius than we do to emulate her virtues. We can only say that he saw no snake in the grass, and that if he had he would certainly not have turned back for it.

When he arrived at Mr. Clumber's his young lady was on the

lawn in a riding-habit. Her eyes were not so bright as they were the day before, and George, with the pleasant boldness of a sailor, asked her if she had been crying for his absence. She said no, but she seemed very much inclined to cry then; for she had heard enough of the conversation between her mother and stepfather on the afternoon before to make her very anxious, little as it was. And she had reason to cry, for, honest and good girl as she was, she knew more of the ways of this wicked world than George did: and George—God help her!—was the first gentleman she had ever met in her life, and she loved him.

Her stepfather came out, and George heard him say, "Go and tell your mother he is come, and bid her see to breakfast." But Mrs. Clumber was ill, and did not appear. They had breakfast, and then they rode southward, followed by two grooms and one dog, a colly.

Ada was not herself by any means; beautiful she was, with that blazing Australian beauty which fades so soon, but her vivacity was gone this morning. The conversation was principally between Mr. Clumber and George for many miles.

The Blue Mountains on their right, they rode pleasantly on through forest and over plain, through a beautiful English-like country all the morning, and stayed at a settler's house at mid-day. It was as good a house as many which he had passed or had entered, but there was a *je ne sais quoi* about the people in it which puzzled him extremely. They were utterly different to the squatters he had met in Sydney; they were not ladies and gentlemen, and were extremely constrained in their manners before him. They were dressed much the same as other people, but there were a hundred points of want of refinement which he noticed, and, as a general rule, they seemed very much surprised at his capture by Clumber, and rather afraid of him. The children, however, particularly the boys, came out in their true colours as the unmitigated little savages they were. George devoutly hoped that there would be no children at the next house they stayed at.

There were not, and the people were a slight improvement on the last, but by no means up to the Sydney mark. They slept here, and were to hunt the next day.

In the morning they started out into the delicious air, full of scent of flowers and song of birds, before the sun was up, and when the east was in colour a primrose green. The dogs barked joyfully, and the horses neighed their pleasure; it was impossible to resist the air and the beauty of all things round, and George gave loose to his spirits and became confidential to the strangers

who surrounded him, numbering about seven or eight, and forgot the fact that they were a sad contrast to the real bush gentlemen he had met. If he had only known the fact, he was among one of the rowdiest set of blackguards in the colony. They talked with their grooms like equals on all kinds of subjects, and were by no means improving society.

Neither Mr. Clumber nor Ada went with them, the former pleading age and fatigue, and the latter, of course, her sex and weakness. The ground over which they began to ride was almost mountainous, deeply timbered, with open valleys of exquisite beauty between the ridges. They had ridden scarcely a quarter of a mile when George saw something large in front of them moving slowly up and down: it was a large brown kangaroo. The next instant the dogs had seen him; the beast was off at full speed, and the sticks were flying about like mad. George forgot everything at once in the wild gallop which followed. The great creature, with infinite dexterity and speed, was going in a manner which would be thought impossible by those who have only seen them in a menagerie. Up hill and down hill were alike to them all now; a mile or two passed, some heavy in and out leaps were taken by George among the branches of giant trees fallen in the forest, but still the pretty animal steered ahead among the bushes and obstacles nearly in a straight line, as fast as ever; and still close to George rode one of Clumber's grooms, whom he afterwards found out to be his head stockman, encouraging him and guiding him.

At the foot of a very steep hill, in a very secluded valley, the kangaroo went to soil in a water hole and was killed. The whole party were up at the death, and they at once, as the horses were fresh, agreed to hunt another; "And," said one of the young men, "let us turn him homeward, and we shall come in for lunch." Every one agreed to that as a "very good idea." George took occasion quietly to thank the stockman for his advice and assistance, and, considering himself the guest of the party, thought it only proper to slip two sovereigns into the stockman's hand. In doing so he looked at him. He was a rough-looking fellow about thirty, but in spite of the strange, defiant, sulky look, which all of the present company had, he did not seem to be entirely a bad fellow. He looked at the money and hesitated, then he looked rather earnestly into George's face, and seemed to deliberate, as if he was thinking of a very important matter. At last he seemed resolved, and put George's money in his pocket with an oath, and no other kind of recognition or thanks whatever,

George thought these strange manners, but he reflected that he was at the Antipodes, where everything is exactly the reverse of everything in Europe, consequently that it might possibly be the correct thing for a man to swear at you for giving him a couple of sovereigns. A diversion to his thoughts soon occurred, which made him think again that he was at the Antipodes: the determination of the whole party was to hunt the next kangaroo towards home: the instant the animal was seen, however, the host's son most dexterously turned it in exactly the opposite direction to that of the way home. It was certainly the longest, for the kangaroo would have had to go round the world in the present cruise to take them one foot nearer the station. One or two of the party swore and turned back, but the others swore and went on; as they none of them seemed to do anything without swearing, this did not surprise George. He went off at a good pace after the dogs, with his friend, the stockman, keeping close to him. This was a harder run than the other, for the dogs were a little tired, and the horses were getting so. One by one the party tailed off, only George and the stockman following the chase, which seemed very long; at last, as they got into a thick scrub, the kangaroo seemed likely to have by far the best of it, and the stockman drew his bridle, causing George to do the same.

"It is bellows to mend, young master," he said; "we had better follow in the trail of the dogs, for there is one I should not like to lose. Will you come on with me?"

George at once consented, and followed his companion through scrub denser than he had ever seen before, for several miles.

"I am glad you are with me," said George, with no notion of danger; "for I should never be able to find my way back!"

"No, master," said the stockman. "There's me and about five others could get out of this here scrub alive. If I was to have your life and blood at this here minute, and pitch you in there, all the traps in Sydney side would never find your bones. You can't see the sun, that's what beats you, and you goes rambling round and round till your tongue gets dry and swoll, and then you goes mad and busts up; and then the eagle hawk has your flesh and the warragals picks your bones, that's nigh about the size of it. But I'll fetch you to a place of safety, and you sha'n't be harmed, because of them sovereigns what you gave me."

George rather wished that he would have shown an inclination to assist him without the sovereigns, but as that seemed to please him he said that he should be most happy to give him a couple more when they got home,

"No, no," said the man; "them first was given willing; I'll do all I can for you."

George began to get uneasy, he knew not why. The stockman was talking very strangely to him, and he could not make it out. He was utterly unarmed, and no match for the man either in strength or courage. He had heard strange tales of bushrangers from his friends in Sydney, and some were out now. What if this man were one?

He might have made his mind perfectly easy on that score. The man, undiscovered, unconvicted, was one of the greatest go-betweens or "fences" among all the bushrangers in New South Wales, and probably might now and then do a little amateur business himself.

"Had we not better turn back?" said George.

"Burn me if I don't think we had," said the other, and he reversed his horse's head, passed George, and began apparently riding in the opposite direction. He was doing nothing of the kind, and had made a perfect semicircle in half a mile, carrying George further and further away from the station, with a view, it is very possible, to "plant" him, or hide him away for his own purpose; but nothing was ever proved against the man, for accident upset all calculations, and no one ever knew the truth for some time after, except those principally concerned.

They passed through the scrub, and came into an open cheerful valley, down which ran a small creek, murmuring over iron-stone boulders, with here and there some lightwood on its banks, and here and there blue gum. They rode down to cross it, George taking his line under an aged gum. Suddenly the stockman cried out "Mind!" and before George had time to attend, his horse gathered himself together and was clambering up the boulders on the other side, while George's chest was brought sharply against an overhanging bough which would not give way. George checked him suddenly, and he and the horse came clattering down together on the cruel stones. The horse rolled partly over him and injured him, then got up and trotted away. George lay perfectly helpless, in agony of mind and body inconceivable, unable to move.

The stockman dismounted, and said, "Now you *have* done it, young master; who would have thought of this?" He took him up gently, and laid him on the grass close to the water, and gave him drink out of a flask he had. He propped up his head with the saddle which he took from George's horse, and then he carefully examined his body, giving him great pain. It was quite evident to a man who had been as often smashed as himself that

the small bone of the right leg was broken, and he mentioned the fact. Then he coolly mounted his horse and rode away in a different direction to that by which he had come. George saw him go silently, and his heart misgave him.

“Come back and say one word more,” he cried aloud; “I will give you any money to save me.” But the man only looked back cunningly at him and rode away.

The poor boy lay in his agony until the sun was gilding the tops of the highest trees, and the swift twilight was settling down into darkness. He saw it all clearly now; the man had left him here to die, so that he might rob his body when he was dead. “I would have given him ten times the worth of my watch and chain, and rings, if he would have stayed by me; but he might have been to the station and back long ago. I am deserted, and must die alone.” Hour after hour of the night passed, and he saw that his short and happy life, with all its brilliant prospects, had come to an end.

“The captain will think that I have broken my faith with him, and have disgraced the service. Night—I—how silent the forest is—how cold it grows—this must be death. Good-bye, grandfather—good-bye, Emily.—Oh, God! in mercy upon me make it short. Our Father——”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOMeward BOUND.

THE stockman was at the station late in the afternoon, about three or four hours later than, with his knowledge of the bush, he need have been. He went into the kitchen and had his tea; the people of the house noticed his arrival very soon, and came out asking where he had last seen George.

He said that he had put him on his way home long before noon, but had gone himself further into the scrub after the dogs. He thought that the young gentleman would have been home some hours ago. He supposed he must have got bushed. He offered to go and look after him as soon as he had done his tea.

“Where did you part from him?” asked Mr. Clumber very anxiously.

“The other side of the first belt of scrub, among the ranges.”

“You must have been out of your mind,” said one of the young

men angrily, "to leave him there. Why, the chances are ten to one against his getting anywhere."

It was certainly true. That scrubby range, nearly without water, was a very dangerous place for any man to get bushed in, leave alone a new chum, and a sailor boy. There was instant alarm, and the search was begun. The alarm was spread to Sydney that an officer was lost in the bush, and the whole resources of the colony were set to work to find him, but without the least result whatever. The governor was extremely anxious from the very first, and said so plainly. "If he has got into that scrub on those mountains, we may not find his bones for a year," was his very first remark. "The horse we may get; but unless the young gentleman is peculiarly guided by Providence, we shall never see him any more. Very few of the police like to venture into it. A few stockmen may know their way about it, but you will get very little assistance from them. It is the Arcadia of the bushrangers, and we cannot drive them out of it."

Everything was tried, however. The horse was found grazing in a township, fifty miles from the last place where poor George was seen, without the saddle, of course. No trace could be found of the poor lad, and one day Captain Hickson's ship was put in mourning, with flags half-mast high, and ropes all loose, for the most popular among her midshipmen.

Orders came for her to sail, and farewells were made to the hospitable city in due form. The Sydney young ladies who had driven their Australian lovers wild with jealousy for a time, once more relented towards them. The ship sailed away homeward bound, and with her crew was at once forgotten. She, if remembered at all, was only remembered from the memory of the merry young officer who died in the bush.

Captain Hickson saw Australia a dim blue line on the horizon, and then he went into his cabin saying, "This will kill Reginald. What a noble boy he was!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE STORM.

REGINALD had long allowed that Job was the most sensible person in the world, when he said that man was born unto trouble, as the

sparks fly upwards. Everything went completely wrong with him in every way. He was rich, he had no anxiety about the future as far as he personally was concerned ; but one vexation followed another so very fast that he really wished himself poor again. He said to Aunt Hester and Mary that he was as badly served as the wicked uncle in the "Babes in the Wood."

"I told you how it would be," said Goodge one evening ; "you should have made yourself preternaturally disagreeable at first ; you have not, and, therefore, you are bullied and patronised by every one, high and low. You are getting down in the mouth. Why can't you pluck up spirit and tell Snizort that he is a bumptious ass."

"I don't think that would do," said Reginald.

"Then write to Owthwaite's bishop and complain of him for preaching against you every Sunday. He let those two candles of his burn on the altar last Sunday when there was light enough to thread a needle by. I will swear to that for you in the Court of Arches. Tell the bishop, that what with his Romanising practices, and what with his denunciations of you, you cannot any longer worship in the church of your forefathers."

"I don't want any more quarrelling, there is quite enough as it is."

"Of course there is. I have observed the same thing with nations. Everybody knows you won't fight, and so everybody insults you. I wish I was squire here ; I would make lively times for some of them."

"What would you do ?" said Reginald.

"I should begin by kicking Bevan," said Goodge. "He is utterly alienating the General from us. I should have an expensive row with Owthwaite in the Arches, and you with your money could leave him a beggar for life. I should then have a turn at Barnett over that decision of his on the Bench about the woman picking up his own sticks. I should write to the Home Secretary about that without any warning. I should begin an action against Snizort for trespass in that business of Halfacre's four-acre. I should give every farmer on the estate notice that his lease would not be renewed ; and I would find a case against the union which would cost them a few hundred pounds or so. Thus you would be usefully employed and happy. As it is, you are idle and miserable."

"And you, Goodge, the peacemaker, give me this advice," said Reginald.

"My dear fellow, I was once in Arabia and wanted to get home. I, therefore, seeing no other way of getting to Mocha, set

four tribes by the ears, and got them to declare war against one another individually. When they had had enough fighting I called their attention to the fact that they were a parcel of fools and offered to act as mediator. My services were accepted with acclamation, and the four sheiks brought me, with a large and enthusiastic escort, to the gates of Mocha. There is nothing like a good row if you are bored."

"Your conduct was scarcely moral, old fellow, was it?"

"My dear Reginald, they had always been cutting one another's throats before I went among them, and they began doing it again the moment I left them; they will also continue to do it until they are annexed by Turkey. Surely I was not so very wrong to utilise their habitual pastime for my own ends. We won India so; you should set these people more by the ears. They would all quarrel furiously with one another if there was a little more mischief made; meanwhile, they are making a holy alliance against you, because you will not fight."

"Well, the boy must come home and fight them," said Reginald. "Goodge, I am too old for much of it. I have lived a very hard uphill life, and I don't want any more quarrelling."

"You mean you have never had any of it," said Goodge.

"Well, I am ready to go when the boy is ready to take my place."

The friends which Reginald had of his own little circle had stuck bravely to him, with one solitary exception. Since Bevan had met General Anders, he had grown more and more cold to Reginald, and had shown him less and less confidence in monetary affairs. General Anders had also come less to Hollingscroft; his continued absence was attributed to his larger and ever-increasing speculations, into which Reginald had not entered; but in truth, Reginald had spoken to him very seriously about some of the later ones, and General Anders had resented it.

There was no change among any of the rest. Aunt Hester was quite as self-possessed as ever she was in her life, and quite as uncertain in her behaviour. Mary was the pleasant little person she had always been, and Mrs. Hickson only spoiled her daughter a little more than usual. All these women in a state of quiescence, in a state of prosperity, appeared quite commonplace. In fact, a woman who is always exhibiting the strong side of her character when she is not wanted to do so—a woman who makes opportunities for showing off, is more or less a considerable nuisance to her friends and family in proportion as she does it. These women worked in the garden, fed chickens, drove ponies, looked after the poor, and paid visits in a most humdrum fashion. They had

their anxieties, for two they loved were at sea, and one, Reginald, seemed always troubled in his mind. But there was nothing startling in their lives: they were a kind of Landwehr—went through their drill regularly, but had plenty of fight in them should they ever be called out.

Miss Emily Hickson was the flower of the family, and a flower who required a great deal of tending. She attached herself principally to the Duke and Duchess, who lived much in town in the old house at Bolton Row, where they had the company of General Anders almost continuously.

Among the rest of Reginald's troubles was a slight coldness between him and the Duke about money matters. Reginald had thought it necessary to say that he thought the General was on some points ill-advised, and the good-natured Duke had thought that Reginald was not the man to speak so about his old friend. But the tiff was a very slight one, though they were not exactly the same to one another for a little time afterwards.

The rancour of Sir Lipscombe Barnett and Mr. Owthwaite was never, it seemed, to be got over. Nothing which Goodge could say would induce either of them to believe that Reginald had not encouraged those two lovers. It was idle to point out that he could not possibly have done anything of the kind. The match had prevented George from making a splendid marriage, and so Sir Lipscombe's anger was easily understood; but it was not so easy to understand Mr. Owthwaite's anger. Reginald wrote to Mr. Morley to make the peace between them, and Mr. Morley tried, but without the smallest success. Morley wrote:—"Owthwaite has been desperately wounded in his secret point—his vanity. He is, with all his great virtues, a bully, and he believes, and will continue to believe, that you encouraged his daughter, who ought to have been his slave, in rebellion. He will forgive his daughter long before he forgives you, the more particularly because he is under a great obligation to you. It is dangerous to confer a great obligation on a man who is always contemplating himself like Owthwaite. When I say contemplating himself, I do not wish it to be inferred that he is selfish—a more unselfish being, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, does not exist. But he is always thinking about himself, and watching how near a state of perfection he attains. A mind like that is sure to be subjected to long fits of vanity and harshness. I would never have given him the living myself—saint as he is—but you would not consult me."

This was highly satisfactory as an analysis of character, but it did not make more pleasant the fact that Mr. Owthwaite set most

of the labourers, and as many of the farmers as he could get to listen to him, against Reginald. Nor was the continued hostility of Sir Lipscombe at all more agreeable, for he acted on the county, and took every occasion to thwart Reginald in every way. They had ceased speaking for some time, and Reginald noticed that Sir Lipscombe always left the Bench when he appeared. A worm will turn, and after this Reginald never missed a petty session; so that the county was entirely deprived of the magisterial assistance of Sir Lipscombe. Sir Lipscombe being pricked sheriff this year, had his married sister out of Gloucestershire, and gave a terrific ball in a marquee, to which every one in the county went except the Hollingscroft people. All the ladies whom they knew came and called on them immediately afterwards, and all and sundry of them were astonished beyond measure at not having met them there. Lady Dory was so particular in her cross-examinations as to their non-appearance, that Aunt Hester cut her short by telling her that Sir Lipscombe had not had the impudence to ask any of them after his shameful treatment of Reginald, and that if he had he would have had his card returned; which did a great deal of good.

Minor troubles were in abundance also, which we must come to before we mention the great and crowning trouble of all. Reginald, with his financial theories brought into practice, found that he must be a much harder landlord than the late landlord, Sir James Jones. Widow Austin and her son were not the worst farmers now on the estate, but better than the average. In spite of his yielding the ground-game to the farmers, the labourers were no better paid than they were before; and there seemed no chance of their ever being so. He helped some labourers to migrate to other parts of England, and some to the Colonies and the States; he infuriated the farmers by this, and unluckily his labourers were of the cowardly, helpless class which are never successful here or elsewhere. Emigration commissioners and Mr. Arch will find out, some day or other, that it is not much use, as regards present results, to draft off the least helpful of the labourers into lands where ten times more self-help is required than is required here. These unsuccessful labourers wrote back such dismal accounts of the Colonies and the States to their friends, that Reginald was looked upon as a swindler by the labouring population generally.*

Of all the people to rise out of the past and plague him, who should turn up but Monseigneur Morton. That worthy and good old man came to stay at the great castle near, where Giant Pope

* This was written many months before the lock-out. As it merely is the experience of thirty years, it is of no value.

dwelt, and he came to see Reginald, who received him with open arms. He repaid his hospitality finely. He discovered the grave of a Saxon saint (a black letter saint with us) close to the north aisle of the church, beside a holy well. What does he do on his return to the Castle but turn out all the sacred things necessary from the chapel, and institute a pilgrimage to the shrine of this saint, with a large portion of the Catholic tenantry, in broad daylight. They came with vestments, banners, incense, and holy water, and, having defiled slowly past Owthwaite's study window, they drew up slap in the middle of his own churchyard, chanting and swinging censers. Since the Gunpowder Plot no such popish atrocity had been committed. Owthwaite was a High Churchman, and so his kind friends thought that it was done with his connivance and consent, whereas he was a furious Anti-papist, and was nearly foaming at the mouth about the whole thing. Reginald asked the pilgrims to take refreshment in his house, which they readily did, just giving time for the villagers to assemble and hunt them out of the place with turnips and with bad language.

Mrs. Davies also, who had been kept on as housekeeper, turned sadly ungrateful, telling everything she knew to Reginald's disadvantage when he lived at Brixton.

He thought it would have been a very innocent, nay, possibly, useful thing, to keep a yacht at Haddensmouth, but that turned out quite unsuccessful. He never sailed in it, and, now that he quarrelled with everybody, or rather, when everybody had quarrelled with him (except Lord Snizort), nobody else sailed in it. It was a floating source of demoralisation, and a public scandal, like everything else which this unfortunate man undertook. Details are, of course, impossible here, but something disagreeable happened connected with Reginald's yacht, and he was spoken to on the Bench about it. Even his defiantly fast friend, Lord Snizort, who never left him, told him that Haddensmouth had been pretty bad before he came, but was considerably worse now.

CHAPTER XL.

A SMALL FAMILY DISCUSSION.

THESE things all of them made him miserable, but the great misery of all has to be told. General Anders was in, high and

low, with Theodorides and Bevan. Bevan especially seemed to have taken entire possession of him, and General Anders appeared to be like wax in his hands. Even Theodorides, possibly for reasons of his own, said a few words about Bevan which alarmed Reginald. Reginald went to town to speak to the Simpson of that day, and ask his advice.

The Simpson of that day and the Murdoch of that day were both young men, one of them actually under thirty, and the other very little over that age. They heard of Reginald's coming, and they happened to be together. As he came in they looked curiously at one another.

The Simpsons and the Murdochs were doing very little business with Anders and Hetherage just now. Their fathers had both retired into a state of sleeping partnership in the country before the arrival of Count Theodorides and Bevan. The immediate fathers of these two young gentlemen had had enough of business, and only obliged from a distance. Had they been personally much in London, they might have known more. The advice they gave, however, was excellent enough according to their light, and the burden of it was, have nothing more to do with General Anders, save in the way of friendship.

The two young fellows, Murdoch and Simpson, were very fine manly young English gentleman, and liked Reginald very much. They would do anything in the way of kindness for him; even had he been poor, would have done more for him than the family in old times had ever done. But they were extremely shrewd, and their parents had told them to be cautious. They had married sisters, and the sisters had permitted them to be fast friends, which is not always the case in this wicked world. So the each was in full confidence of the other, and knew what the other would say.

"I am glad to find you both here," said Reginald, "for I wished to speak to both of you."

"And," said Simpson, "as we have only one voice between us, that voice says, we both wanted to speak to Cousin Reginald very particularly, and we both wish Cousin Reginald well, for we are under obligations to him, and we are anxious to repay them."

"By warning me?" said Reginald.

"Exactly," said Murdoch.

"I think that I am pretty well warned," said Reginald smiling; "but I want some information."

"Quite so," said Simpson. "Suppose that we told you that we wanted some information, and were going to ask you for it."

"I will tell you all I know, save on one subject."

"And we know what that subject is," said Murdoch. "A shut-up room and a dead secret, eh, cousin?"

"No, I don't mean that folly," said Reginald. "I simply don't care anything at all about that. I don't fancy there is much there, except matters which had better be left alone. I don't indeed."

They were both evidently puzzled and disappointed, and they showed it.

"Will there be no end to this silly lawsuit then, cousin?"

"At my death, of course, there will be a compromise of some kind. But I did not come here to speak of that. I want to ask you, firstly, what do you know of Bevan?"

"Nothing. But, to be frank, we know enough to make us withdraw from any business transactions with General Anders as long as he has his ear."

"Who was he?" said Reginald.

"If he was a certified convict from Sydney we should not so much care; but he cannot be traced. He came out of Mexico, and we know no more of him. Speaking, as being strictly in the bosom of the family, we think him a scoundrel; in the same way as we think General Anders mad. We have withdrawn from all connection with the latter gentleman, as we said before; but we shall be happy to remain in business connections with you, Reginald, for you are safe—you have realised. There is no business connection between you and Anders—no partnership?"

"There never was and there never will be," said Reginald, looking quietly at them. "We have speculated heavily together, very often dividing the risks. The frank truth about the matter is that when we were better friends he told me that he was getting old and tired of it, and asked me to realise, so that we might have something safe in our old age. I have done so. I have not a sixpence in common with him now. If he goes wrong beyond a certain extent, he can come and share with me. If he goes wrong beyond a certain extent, why then he ruins me with him. That is what makes me so anxious."

"We don't see how he can ruin you," said Murdoch. "What you have—some £200,000—is all your own. There is no ghost of a pretence of partnership between you. And he was very clever in persuading you to realise."

"Yes; but if he went wrong I should have to give up every penny to put him right, don't you see?"

"That is nonsense," said they.

"But it is common sense—it is common honour," said Reginald. "He put me in the way of making my fortune, and

because he is misguided, am I to see him go to his grave a bankrupt in order to keep a few comforts round me? Nonsense again, my dear young cousins. Anders would die of a broken heart if he could not pay everybody; and I consider my realised estate as much his as it is my own."

"You are as mad as General Anders, cousin," said Murdoch.

"No; not so mad," said Reginald. "There are matters of which you know nothing at all. There are matters of old standing which it would be difficult to make you understand. Do you know who General Anders is? Do you know who the father of General Anders was?"

"No."

"Ha! then you cannot understand matters. My grandfather, William Hetherage, did a great kindness to General Anders, when my grandfather thought that he wanted help. He never did want help, but he has repaid that kindness ten times over, not merely in putting me in the way of making money, but in pecuniary assistance long ago. It is a matter of absolute certainty, that if Anders were to go, all I possess must go after him, and I must begin the world again."

"After so many years, Cousin Reginald?"

"After so many years. I put it to both of you: could I leave Anders in the lurch after what he has done for me?"

"Would it not be better to share what you have with *him*, if anything happened, than to share it with his creditors?"

"You don't know Anders. He would die by his own hand if every one was not paid," said Reginald.

"You are singularly obtuse, Cousin Reginald. Is his honour so fine that he would ruin you to save his own reputation before the world?"

"I know my duty," said Reginald, "and I shall do it. He will never be consulted."

The cousins looked at one another, and then one said, with the evident approval of the other—

"But the boy George, Cousin Reginald—have you considered him? We thought that one of your main objects in realising was for his sake; you must think of him. You spoke once about a pleasant happy home for him when he left the sea. Have you given that idea up? Should things go wrong in any way, would you deprive him of Hollingscroft and all its healthy, peaceful pleasures?"

"I wish," said Reginald, solemnly, "that Hollingscroft had originally belonged to the merchant Digby, that he had left it, as he originally did the whole of his property, to the Devil, and that the will had never been disputed."

“Are you not happy there, cousin?” said young Simpson.

“No, I am *not*,” said Reginald; “and I would sooner that that boy of mine stayed in his profession until my death, than that he should undertake the management of the place. Let him learn the management of a ship; he may do *that*. He can lash a man up and give him two dozen for looking saucy, and no questions asked. What would be said in Parliament if I fixed up the rector and gave *him* two dozen, as I should dearly like to do. Fancy old Snizort under the cat-o’-nine tails; how I should laugh. No; let the boy stay at sea, if everything goes wrong, until my death. It is a weary life without him, but the sea will make a man of him.”

“Yet you must be anxious about him sometimes,” said Simpson.

“For all those that travel by land or by sea,” replied Reginald. “Yes; when it blows hard I am anxious; but I know that he is safe. This is not business, however. If Anders goes to the bad, I go with him, that is to be understood—the chances are equal that he will not. Help me to prevent it, if you can. What do you know about Theodorides?”

“Why, nothing. He claims kinship with us on the wrong side of the blanket; but we know nothing of him. Twice some of our American cousins have been over here, and he has always avoided them. You see, Cousin Reginald, that now you are out of General Anders’s confidence, we really know very little more than you do. If you have made this resolution to share with the General, we can only say that we think you very foolish, and the possibilities are that you will die head clerk in our house with a salary of £600 a year.”

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NEWS COMES HOME.

MISS EMILY HICKSON, not being “out,” found time in London extremely dull with the Duke and Duchess. She signified her royal intention of removing to Hollingscroft to see her mother. Neither the Duke nor the Duchess offering any strong objections, she went there. No one was in very good humour at Hollingscroft, and she found the place rather duller than London. She

considered herself spitefully used by the general arrangements of Providence, and she mentioned the fact to Goodge.

"What is the good of being in Bolton Row?" she said. "There's grandma always dressed up and going out, and there's the Duke always dressed up and going out. What is there for *me* to do? I am a mere dolly of a school-girl—not even that; I wish I was, for I could plague the governess. Then I came here—everything seems wrong here; there is no society; no one comes. I dress and look my best, but there is no one to look at me; and the people seem all to have lost their tempers. I think I shall lose mine."

"I would not do that," said Goodge.

"Why not?"

"Our friends are getting old, and you should not be frivolous and silly, but should be like a sunbeam in the house, enlivening them. Child, the time may come when you will look back to these present days as the happiest in your life. Every one has spoilt you; be careful that you do not spoil yourself. Think of others more, my child."

Emily looked at him thoughtfully.

"I do not say that you are selfish; I only say that you are thoughtless. Try not to be so. What should you do if sorrow and trouble fell on these good people, who have been more than friends to you?"

The girl began to grow red. She answered—

"I would give up all my life to help any one of them, or be a comfort to them in any way I could."

"Are you a comfort to them now?"

The girl was silent. At last she said—

"You mean that I am more plague than profit?"

"Exactly what I do mean," said Goodge; "and I am very glad that you see the matter as I do. You have an idea that if there was trouble in the house you would at once become the angel in it. You should practise the *rôle* a little more. Your ways are very pretty and your impertinences are amusing, but they are quite out of place here and now. You discount the love which people bear to you by continually drawing on it. You are worthy of better things than being a doll and puppet, and you are getting to be a very troublesome doll. I can assure you that unless you take up the present tone of the house more than you seem inclined to do at present, you will by no means add to its comfort by your vivacity." And Goodge left her standing there, and departed in an extremely ill humour for his walk.

"There," he said to himself as he started, "I think that I

have given that young lady a piece of my mind. I cannot always keep my temper with her. She has got herself surrounded so with a circle of self that she has become an intolerable nuisance. There is bother enough without her."

Going through the farmyard he met Reginald. "I am going for the letters," he said, "will you walk with me?" But Reginald said "No." He was looking after his farm. Reginald saw the gaunt figure, in a pith helmet, go striding across the park among the deer, and thought very little about it then. Still, that figure brushing through the fern, under the overhanging oak boughs, from light to shadow, from shadow to light, never left his eye on this side of the grave.

He was in his justice room—his study, when Goodge came back; he looked up cheerfully. Goodge looked very pale. Reginald was writing, and he put down his pen.

"What is the matter, Goodge?" he said very slowly.

"Reginald, the very worse conceivable."

"Is Anders dead?"

"No; nothing of the kind; far otherwise."

"Is any one else dead?"

"Yes."

"Hickson?"

"No. Some one else."

"You are not going to tell me the disaster which I see in your eyes. Goodge, have mercy upon me. After so many years' friendship, don't be my murderer."

But Goodge buried his face in his hands and was silent.

"This simplifies matters," said Reginald. "I can go to him now; I am coming to you, George. My darling, I am coming!"

Goodge rose and put his hand on his shoulder. "Reginald, do you think that God would let you meet our boy in heaven if you came before His judgment throne with the bloody hand of a suicide?"

"I was not thinking of that, I tell you truly," said Reginald. "I should have done that long ago, if I had ever intended to do it at all. I am, as you see, perfectly coherent and calm. I have borne so very much, Goodge, *that I think I could bear anything now, except joy.* Am I never to see my darling again, then?"

"Never!"

"God's will be done; but He has been hard upon me. I was sorry for adversity because of others, for I never cared much for myself. I was glad of prosperity, and rejoiced in it, until God turned it into ashes in my mouth. It is all over now, Goodge. God must give me rest soon. Will you tell me how it happened?"

“I have a letter from Hickson, telling all about it; there is another for you, no doubt containing the same intelligence. The boy was lost in the bush, kangaroo hunting, and has perished.”

“Alone?”

“Yes: all alone, poor fellow.”

“Goodge, you have been near to it yourself. Do they suffer much?”

“No. Oh, dear, no,” said Goodge, choking with emotion. “They get delirious, as I did myself, and they know no more. They die as easily as you would in your bed.”

“Hush! he was a pretty boy—at least, in my eyes. Was he much disfigured when they found him? Where is he buried?”

“Reginald, do face facts once and for all: he perished in the bush, and his body has never been found—almost certainly never will be.”

Reginald looked full at Goodge; he looked ten years older than he did when the conversation began, but he was perfectly firm and self-possessed. He opened Hickson’s letter and read it carefully through; he made no comment on it at first, but after a time he said, “There is no proof that the boy is dead at all.”

“He is, however,” said Goodge. “Don’t be insane enough to buoy yourself up with such foolish hopes. The poor lad is dead, and we must break it to the women.”

“True. I did not think of that. I thought only of myself. You think, on your soul, Goodge, that there is no hope?”

“My dear Reginald, cannot you understand that the boy is dead, and that you never will see him any more?”

“Yes; I suppose I shall realise it soon. You had better tell Hester; I will tell Mary. We have been through so much together, that I think it would come better from me.”

He went to the drawing-room, where Mary was sitting with Aunt Hester, and asked her to come with him into his own room. Goodge heard the door close behind them, and in a few minutes poor Mary, who had suffered so long and so patiently, was sending shriek after shriek ringing through that happy home which Reginald had secured for himself and for her in their quiet old age. The last hope for which they lived was gone from them, but those two remained—a broken-down old man and a desolate-hearted widow.

“Let me go to her,” said Aunt Hester, rising. “What is the matter, Goodge?”

“George is dead,” said Goodge; “and he has broken it to her. Leave them alone together, I tell you. Don’t disturb such grief, as you live: let them be—let them be!”

In the horror, the tears, the confusion which followed, one person was quite unnoticed. The poor little, tiny Emily, whom they had petted, spoilt, and played with so long, seemed to feel it less than any of them. Perfectly dry-eyed, she was about among them all, pervading the house, and doing kind little services for every one. No one seemed to notice her coming and going, yet one man had his eyes on her with regret and distress, for he had been unkind to her that morning, and he saw how humble and penitent she was. "Before God I will never speak harshly to a woman again," thought Goodge. Late in the afternoon, when Mary was quiet on her bed, and Reginald had seen them for one instant to tell them so, a circumstance occurred which made Goodge firmer in his resolution. Aunt Hester, Mrs. Hickson, and he were sitting quietly talking in the drawing-room, where the blinds were drawn down, when the poor little maid Emily appeared with a tray and three cups of tea upon it. She had made it for them herself, she said, and was afraid that it was very bad, because she had never made tea before; but she hoped that they would drink it, and try to forgive her for any trouble she had caused them in old times; "they are gone by for ever now," she said, and in trying to say more threw herself on her mother's bosom, and lifted up her voice and wept, refusing to be comforted.

CHAPTER XLII.

A PROMISING ROMANCE COMES TO AN END.

Mrs. CLUMBER had an entirely thorough-going way of doing business, which, as we have said before, reminded us of the late lamented Mrs. Manning. Her husband, on the other hand, had less genius than his wife in that particular direction. Mrs. Clumber's plan was simply this:

Her husband had a very valuable secret—or, at all events, had told her that he had—about the Digby will case. Her woman's intellect told her that the secret was worth £30,000 to Messrs. Theodorides and Bevan, and that the best thing to do was to clear every one out of the way who stood between her and a good bargain. Clumber, on the other hand, was of opinion that the more parties left to bargain with, the greater was the chance of a good arrangement.

Matters were tolerably understood between the worthy couple on the morning of the kangaroo hunt. Clumber had entirely fallen into his wife's plan, and praised her for her sagacity, with every intention in the world of entirely thwarting her, by merely delaying George until his ship was sailed, and then think what he would do next. Like all irresolute men he hated words, and so he saw his wife closeted with the stockman before-mentioned without exhibiting the least symptom of interfering.

Had George been done with as Mrs. Clumber directed, we should have seen nothing more of him. A hint in certain quarters that a young gentleman was bushed in that scrub, accompanied with the extra information that he had a gold watch and chain and two diamond rings, would have been quite enough to prevent his returning home any more, without the slight refresher of a couple of ten-pound notes. Most likely no understanding in words was ever come to between Mrs. Clumber and the stockman, but she made him understand her perfectly well. The stockman incidentally came to her husband for the two ten-pound notes, and so saved him the trouble of asking any impertinent questions. Clumber knew that she had given them to the stockman for necessary expenses. He merely doubled the sum on the condition of safely "planting" the young gentleman with certain friends of his until the ship was gone. That was the stockman's intention when the lamentable accident happened, which put him out of his reckoning. He was most terribly afraid that he had unwittingly obeyed his mistress's orders instead of his master's, and that the boy would die. They were ten miles short of the place where George would have been cooped up long enough to serve Clumber's vague purposes. The boy had gained on the stockman's rude nature by his frankness, and he was bitterly sorry that he had ever had anything to do with the matter. Having left the boy, he rode away into the mountains, vowing never to have his hand in such a business again.

It was very late, as we said, when he got back to the station, and Clumber was a little time before he could get him alone without suspicion. At last they were together, and Clumber asked—

“Is it all right?”

“It is as right as I have been able to make it. He came to terrible grief: his horse came down. I went away like mad for assistance as soon as I had made him comfortable. I found Jim at home, and he said he would be with him soon after nightfall. He won't be able to move for three weeks, but they will take good care of him. Jim is as good as a doctor. You need not

fret yourself about him in any way, I think. I will be away again soon, and let you know how he gets on."

"Do, like a good soul. I will pay you well if he lives. Not one word to the missis."

"In course not. You had better smuggle some brandy away, for I doubt Jim has got nothing but whiskey. I'll take it to him."

"Where will he be?" said Clumber.

The stockman looked at Clumber, and deliberately shut up one eye. That inquiry was no use, and Clumber laughed at his simplicity in asking it.

"How soon will you be back?" asked Clumber, going on another tack.

"Four hours," was the incautious answer.

"I know where he is now then," said Clumber. "He is safe enough there. I will get you a bottle of wine and a bottle of brandy; but mind he does not see you."

The man came into Clumber's bedroom out of the verandah about two o'clock, and found him snoring heavily. He got hold of one of his hands, and squeezed it gently. The snoring ceased, but the old man did not move or speak; he knew that old convict signal well enough.

"He is right enough," said the stockman. "They have got him to bed and to sleep. They couldn't get him the length of the place you know of—it was too far. They've got him in an old mimi, not a mile from where he fell down, and the deuce won't find him there."

"How far did you get him before it happened, then?" whispered the old man.

"The upper end of Damper Creek," was the answer.

"He is safe enough in the scrub round there," Clumber replied; and so they parted.

In the morning, of course, the search was renewed, and the alarm given in Sydney. Miss Ada rode away to tell her mother, but she never arrived at home; in fact, she had no intention of doing so. She was perfectly well accustomed to ride about by herself, and was prepared to do so this very morning—in fact, was standing before her horse in the verandah when one of the young ladies of the house came out, and created some confusion by saying—

"Law, Ada, dear! however will you ride with that skirt under your habit; you'll be so uncomfortable!"

But the young lady said that she wanted to take it home, and, looking as if she wished her friend at a considerable distance, rode away, and disappeared down the road among the trees.

She had been listening at her father's window the night before. Anxious beyond all measure at what she had heard previously, she had never undressed herself, and at last heard in the middle of the night the sound of a horse's feet approaching. Then she heard the rails go down and go up again ; and then she heard the horse neigh as he was sent loose in the paddock ; then she heard the steps of a man coming cautiously through the garden towards her father's window.

She heard as much as she wished to hear. She knew the creek at the point where it came into the main river, and she determined to follow it up. Armed with her knife, and a skirt on under her riding-habit, she found herself at the junction of the creek and the river by twelve o'clock in the morning. She at once began forcing her way up it.

At first there were cattle tracks through the thick tea-scrub, and she got on pretty well ; but her difficulties increased the further she went, until she came to a dense mass of fallen timber and thick Eucalyptus scrub, beyond which neither cattle nor horse seemed to have passed. She was an hour getting through, not without a little hard work with her knife, and sometimes, poor thing, sitting down to refresh herself with a good cry. But once past the barrier, the valley of the creek opened out into ground where it was possible to ride. It was an impregnable native fastness ; but she was determined to do what she had in hand.

It was three o'clock, before, peering about her, she came in an open glade on the signs of the accident. The boy was only a short distance from here ; she at once began to sing, and to stop between every verse.

Her ruse was successful : she was reconnoitered. Had she been a policeman she would have been welcomed with a shot ; as a solitary woman she was allowed an interview. An evil-looking old man, coming from a direction contrary to the real one, showed himself. She at once took possession of him in an imperial manner.

"Oh, here you are. Look here, my father has sent me to nurse the young officer who is planted here. We did not mean him to get hurt ; his life is fearfully valuable to us. If you don't mind what you are about with him, we will make this crib too warm for you. Is Jim here ?"

He had been listening to every word. "You are a plucky young lady, Miss Honey," said the bushranger, whom some said was worthy of better things. "You are safe and welcome."

"I mean to make myself both," said the young lady, showing her knife. "Where is he ?"

“ We have made him as comfortable as we can ; here he is, and my wife with him.”

The poor boy was undoubtedly very ill, without fever sufficient to induce actual delirium, but quite sufficient to make him perfectly careless about surrounding objects. During the day they got more and more bark, and made a really nice hut with a bed-place for him ; he was as comfortable as circumstances would permit ; and the bushranger’s wife and Ada were kind nurses to him.

It was after the second visit of the stockman that he discovered where Ada was, and he told her father. He was not sorry that she should be there, for a new scheme at once entered into his irresolute brain : suppose the boy *should* retain sufficient gratitude for him to marry her when he was old enough. The Lord Chancellor might object, but that might be got over.

Three weeks they kept him there before he really could move at all ; and it was ten days more before Ada, who had left him and returned many times now, took him for a short walk alone, and, kneeling before him, told him her tale.

He was among the bushrangers, and they would try to make an immense demand for his ransom, or kill him. She had accidentally found out what had befallen him from an old servant ; and so on, with an endless rigmarole, part of which she had previously concocted, and part of which she made up on the spot. She pointed out to him that if he betrayed her, she was lost. He promised not to betray her, and they exchanged their only kiss. She had so contrived that they could escape, and she and the stockman got him romantically to the station from which he had started, and from thence back to Sydney, where he first learnt that his ship had sailed.

His story was considered extremely romantic and queer, but his injuries were undoubtedly real, and not much inquiry was made about the matter. The captain of the *Doris* stared considerably ; but on the whole thought that George had better go home in the next ship and explain himself to his captain, remarking that it was no business of his to express an opinion one way or another.

Clumber knew perfectly well that should the truth ever be known about his action in this foolish matter to his wife, he would not be particularly comfortable in her hands. He was so perfectly satisfied on this point, that he got her to agree to his going to England, and taking her daughter with him. This arrangement had been agreed upon before the reappearance of George before an astonished and somewhat scandalised Sydney.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO OLD FRIENDS COME TOGETHER.

It was a foolish plot carried out with a feeble and hesitating hand on the part of Clumber. It led, however, to singularly unfortunate and disastrous results at home. For six weeks Reginald believed George to be dead, and so just at the time when he should have kept his wits about him most, he was simply carelessly desperate, without a solitary aim in life.

He told Goodge that his head was going, and laid before him a little plan of which Goodge, after a deal of questioning, consented. It was only the executing of a deed of gift for £30,000 to Mary. This he had done at once; he then let affairs take their course, and appeared to be totally unconcerned about anything.

He was not morose, but he declined to see any one except his family. When the news of the disaster came, his enemies relented at once, and would have been very kind, but he would see no one at all. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe had made mutually the wonderful discovery that the runaway match was not such a disaster after all, and that Reginald was not in any way to blame about it. They wrote a joint note asking to see him, but he returned an evasive answer. Every one was extremely kind to him now; but he did not want kindness, he wanted peace, and he was likely to get none at all.

The supposed death of this boy caused very singular complications in the great lawsuit which had been waiting on Reginald's death. The Simpsons, Murdochs, and Talbots began to arouse themselves about it, after many years, and Reginald for the first time heard the word "compromise" from young Murdoch, within a fortnight of the news of the boy's death. It passed in at one ear and out at the other; he thought nothing more about the matter. Murdoch and Simpson did, however, and the Digby will case began to grow silently a very lively thing indeed, from this failure of heirs under the Hetherege branch of the family.

Goodge was called into consultation with Murdoch and Simpson, and left them with a rather brightened face, but he said nothing to Reginald, because at least a year would have to pass before anything could be done in the way of a compromise, and they, at that time of speaking, could not say one word about any offer. Simpson thought that if two deaths could be proved, they might give Reginald ten thousand a year for his life; but Murdoch laughed at this, and said that no one knew what money was left.

Said Goodge, "Which two lives do you speak of?"

"Those of James Murdoch and George Simpson. You will think it absurd, but we have no proofs of their death. I don't see how we can move without them."

"I don't believe they *are* dead," said Goodge. "Are you quite sure that Theodorides is not your *uncle*, Simpson?"

"No, we are sure of *that*," said Simpson. "What we are not so sure about is ——. Well, never mind. See if you can rouse old Reginald about the matter. It will do him good."

This happened only in the third week of the mourning time, other things meanwhile had happened of which they knew nothing.

After the first news of George's death, General Anders had come at once to Hollingscroft, had come into Reginald's study, and had sat down beside him quickly, with his arm on his shoulder.

They talked long together. Not a cloud was between them in any way now. They were only two old men whose lives were drawing to a close, and who called up pleasant old memories from the past. Anders was his own self again in the presence of his friend's great affliction; not one word of business was spoken of between them, when General Anders rose to ring for his fly.

"You won't stay to-night, then?" said Reginald. "They would all like to see you so much."

"I! No," said the General. "My dear fellow, I am up to the eyes in business. I have no time now; I am busy night and day. Snizort, Bevan, and I do not let grass grow under our feet. Our last thing is the great thing. The Danube and Don Canal will be an enormous work certainly. Politically speaking, it is immoral, because it will play the mischief with Turkey. But our great canalisation and irrigation scheme in the Salt Lake basin is far finer. Shares are at par now; let us get five per cent. over, and out I go."

"You have too many irons in the fire," said Reginald.

"Not I. I come of a good money-getting stock. I wish you would give us a little of your advice sometimes."

"I will give it at once," said Reginald. "Sell out, and live like a reasonable being."

General Anders smiled, and went away, waving his hand.

Reginald went upstairs to the boy's room the first time that day. It was all as he had arranged it for his return from sea, and he sat and pondered deeply about the short future which was left him in life.

“I am no use at all now,” he said. “Now I have provided for Mary there is nothing left for me to do. This house is very sad. I will stay here a week, and then I will go to Anders in London. I may possibly prevent him making a fool of himself. I would do that if I could, but it is hopeless; everything must go to the devil its own way. Still, I will go to London. I wish I was ill; but I am perfectly well. If I was ill, I could rest, and attend to my symptoms; but I have no such resource. Hang it all, I will go to London, and at all events get rid of the miserable round of petty botherations here. I shall get into trouble, I have no doubt, but that will amuse me. I have not been in my place in Parliament more than five times since February. I will go there. Snizort will be there, but he will only amuse me. Yes, I will go to the Duke and Duchess at Bolton Row.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

REGINALD TRIES TO PAY HIS DEBT TO GENERAL ANDERS.

REGINALD took leave of his sorrowing household, and told them where he was going. He went into Mary's room and bid her good-bye, and she told him that he was doing right. She tried to ask him something several times, but at last she wrote it down. It was a request, not a very great one; she wanted him to get for her the boy's sword and such things as he had left in the ship.

“My dear,” said Reginald, simply, “Hickson will bring them.”

“Don't name him to me,” she said, eagerly and angrily. “I can't bear to hear his name mentioned. He tempted my boy to sea, and then let him go ashore to die in that hideous place. And tell Mrs. Hickson that I won't see her, nor that horrid little creature of a daughter of hers. They were both in it, and I won't see them. Tell Hester.”

So Reginald left his “happy” home. His last words were, as he got into the carriage: “Hester, don't think me a coward for flying, but I should go mad here.”

She kissed him and patted him on the shoulder. “Kind, long-suffering old boy, for you will never be anything else, you are quite right to go. You are only an additional cause of anxiety to us, for we try so hard to save you trouble. Try to

forget yourself in London, my dear ; we women will manage one another here."

"Best of women, good-bye," said Reginald, jumping into the carriage. He was whirled away, and left Aunt Hester standing motionless on the steps, with the *Times* on her head to keep off the sun. There was something in that paper which might have interested her, if she ever read the City Article.

Reginald was very comfortable in his carriage, and, at one time, calculated the results of driving all the way to London in it. It was only one hundred and twenty miles, and the thing was by no means impossible. He had every earthly comfort packed by his servant in it and about it ; the only reason why he did not do so was that he had never heard of anybody doing it before. He, however, dismissed the idea, and relapsed into the *Spectator*, left the *Times* behind for Aunt Hester, and thought no more about the matter.

Arriving at the station, he was aroused by finding a carriage blocking the way. It was Lord Snizort's carriage, and the servants were getting the luggage down. A porter left Lord Snizort's servants, and ran to Reginald's carriage.

"Is Lord Snizort here?" asked Reginald.

"Yes, sir."

"I will get out then, James," he whispered to his servant. "Don't move a thing, as you love me ; I don't know but what I may drive a station further on, and catch the next train."

He went into the station, and there was the great Snizort, with his head rammed close to the hole where they gave the tickets, abusing the clerk. Reginald at once saw that a journey to town with that man would add a year to his life. His resolution was taken at once. It might have been better, on the whole, if he had endured his lordship, because from Lord Snizort's habit of never leaving off talking he would probably, during the journey, have told Reginald a great many things which it would have been better for him to know. However, he there and then made up his mind to drive to London, and, with his usual luck, lost his opportunity of hearing much. "Not," as he said afterwards to Goodge, "that it would have made the least difference to me, I never was lucky."

Lord Snizort having, purse in hand, bullied the clerk on the subject of the lateness of a train the day before yesterday, until the unhappy young man retreated, put his head through the ticket-hole and glared round the interior in search of that young man, with a view to further objurgation. In the meantime, a farmer coming for his ticket, and seeing nothing in the usual place

but a human stern, there and then shoved it, not knowing—as how should he?—that it belonged to one of the first noblemen in the county. Lord Snizort, finding himself assaulted in the rear, at once made a violent effort to recover himself, during which he dropped his hat on the clerk's side of the hole, hit himself violently on the back of the head, and sent about forty pounds in sovereigns and shillings flying all over the office. He then, bareheaded, advanced furiously on Reginald, and asked him what the devil he meant by doing that.

Reginald explained, and offered to help him to pick up his money. Lord Snizort was going to begin talking, and had got as far as—“My dear Hetheridge, what can I say about this fearful disaster which has befallen you?—” when Lady Snizort came sharply out of the ladies' waiting-room, bonnet, reticule, and all.

“The human mind,” said her ladyship, not in the least degree knowing what she was going to say next, but conscious, like some extempore preachers, that if she once got on her legs it was not easy to stop herself, “is so variously constituted that its ramifications are with difficulty followed by the most profound of ancient or modern sages. Taking grief and sympathy to be co-existent always in every class of being above the mere brutes, can I look on at the disaster——”

But by this time Lord Snizort had picked up some of his sovereigns and the servants were picking up the rest. He may be said to have got his wind, and started off on his own score—not that her ladyship ever dreamed of leaving off.

“The interests of a vast dominion like the British Empire,” said Lord Snizort, “thrown too often, as they are, into the hands of the ignorant and ignoble, are more often benefited by the knowledge and experience of such men as my friend Hetheridge. When I see such a man, rending himself from a once happy home, under the shadow of a great affliction, to take part in the councils of the nation, then I say that my heart warms to that man. Hetheridge, I am devilish sorry for you.”

“Manfully spoken, and kindly, Lord Snizort. I shall not be in London, however, for three days.”

At this moment Lord Snizort was accosted from behind by his servant. “Will you put your hat on, my lord?”

“What the ——?” said Lord Snizort furiously. “I have got my hat on, sir. Do you think that I would stand bareheaded in a railway station?”

Lady Snizort had to stop her talk to point out to him that he had really knocked his hat off in the ticket-hole, and that his servant had fetched it. Lord Snizort looked at the footman as if

he would very much like to catch him at it again, and then put it on in a suspicious manner, as if he was by no means sure even now.

But the train came, and Reginald helped to push Lady Snizort into the carriage, which was a process very similar to getting a fortnight's bundle of family linen for the wash down a narrow staircase. She talked the whole time, and Lord Snizort never left off. Then Reginald went out and spoke to his servants on the subject of driving to London. They fell into the plan willingly, and a message being despatched for horse and man necessaries to meet them by train, away went Reginald with every independent comfort in that little microcosm, his carriage, through one of the most beautiful parts of England.

From village to town, from town to city, from city to village again; under overarching elms, across bright rivers, past stately houses and flower-encircled cottages: the weather beautiful and bright, the roads perfection, and the interest continual. Old market-houses, quaint streets in village and town, bridges, and, lastly, churches too numerous to count or to remember: some small, half-hidden among the graves, seeming nothing more than larger tombstones themselves, some tall, solemn, and majestic, only requiring a Benedictine monk or two round the porch to carry you in imagination back some four centuries, when the "Bishop of Rome" had authority in these realms such as neither king nor kaiser has now, and when the dissenting minister in his garden, or the Rector on his brown cob, would by no means have found that the lines had fallen to them in pleasant places, but the contrary; nay, when Mrs. Rector and her pony carriage did not exist—a most wonderful thing to think of. Then the great city, with its red roofs and the high chalk downs staring down the ends of streets, close overhead: the swarming schoolboys pervading the town in every direction, and seeming almost as numerous as the townfolk. And last, not least, the long cathedral, into which it was pleasant to saunter before dinner, and hear the splendid evening service while the afternoon sun came flaming through the many-coloured windows, making the white-robed clergymen as gay as though the old times had come back and they were in Catholic vestments. Then the summer's evening settling down over the town, and the ramble among the lawns and groves behind the great fane of Wykeham, and the bright chalk river forcing its crystal water everywhere under the quaint over-hanging houses.

"Why have I never travelled before," thought Reginald. "I have heard of change of scene. Matters look so very different

to me now from what they did at home. The *post equitem* theory is partly humbug. I will certainly travel, and travel alone, too."

Things did not look quite so bright when he woke the next morning; but when he was on the road again he cheered up, and passed a pleasant day with the books he had bought at Winchester, with looking at the passing landscape, and with getting a walk up-hill now and then, or sauntering along the road for his carriage to overtake him. By the time he arrived in London he felt wonderfully cheered and refreshed, and the unfeigned welcome which he got at Bolton Row was very pleasant indeed. He had proposed to go to a private hotel, but they would not hear of it: he would be free as air there, and there he must stay.

On the whole, he was not sorry at the arrangement; it gave him society without any trouble, and the freedom of avoiding it if he thought proper. The Duke and Duchess were seeing a great deal of company, more than ever Reginald remembered. Isabel certainly received at least once or twice a week, in some way or another, and was out to two or three places every night. Reginald ought, by right, to have offered the use of his horses in addition to her own, but he knew how good servants dislike being at the orders of any one but their masters, and so did not. Isabel knew his motive, and never asked for the carriage once.

Isabel had, on the whole, been disappointed with her *protégée*; Miss Murdoch ought to have married better somehow. It was true that disgraceful brother of hers had prevented it, and it was no fault of hers; but it was such a disappointment that she should become a mere sailor's wife. Certainly she would be a baronet's wife as soon as Captain Hickson's uncle had the decency to die, but she ought to have done much better. She had become a very second-rate person, and her little daughter was unendurable. Isabel, to forget a rather disappointed life, mixed in Society more and more, and General Anders was nothing loth to accompany her and her husband.

Reginald allowed the necessity of society, but he did not care for it, and wondered that Anders did. Anders laughed, and said that it was necessary to his position, and so turned the matter off.

The General's friendship towards him had entirely revived. They were together as they had been at the best of times, and all their old confidence was fully restored. They began almost the first day to have long talks over the present state of affairs, and Reginald's face grew longer and longer as matters were disclosed to him. The General was getting uneasy himself, by no means too soon.

The speculations were so extremely intricate, that Reginald, with all his head for figures, found it very difficult to understand them. The General seemed to be in everything; Lord Snizort in several; but in the largest and most doubtful of all the affairs he found first Bevan, and next Theodorides, almost supreme. It gave him extreme uneasiness, and he said so.

"You seem rather to have lost your head, Anders," he said frankly. "It would have been much better if I had never left you."

"I confess that now," said the General; "but I am a great fool, and I have dwelt too much on one idea—on the forbidden subject. Don't speak of it; we can do very well yet, depend upon it."

"We may still," said Reginald; "but we must make haste. You might make a terrible mess of affairs as we now stand. It is perfectly obvious that you must get out of at least one-half these things, and take very great care about the other half."

"I allow it, Hetherège; I perfectly allow it; but don't you see that it is impossible: the removal of my name would bring on a smash. I am the only responsible person in at least three of the largest affairs, unless you consider Theodorides and Bevan responsible."

"I profoundly distrust both of them. We have not the remotest proof that they are either of them sound men. The smallest check now would be extremely disastrous. These schemes are all good enough in the end, but they have been so fearfully promoted. Who did all our advertising and puffing?"

"Principally, nay entirely, Theodorides and Bevan."

"I will go to work at once and see what can be done; meanwhile we must give confidence. We are both members of the Stock Exchange, it will therefore be necessary for me to enter into public partnership with you as a stockbroker. I am known as a safe man, and that will be the best thing we can do. It will give us time, and I believe that I can put things right in time; but we must be very careful in future."

"But, my dear Hetherège, you risk all you have in case of matters turning out badly. You are safe: why rush into danger for me?"

"I have provided for Mary, and the boy is dead. I am only paying off an old debt," said Reginald smiling; "do you remember when you used those words to me? I wanted the money you gave me then ten times more than you do now. Don't bury your face in your hands now; we shall get through very well. I have no one left to work for but you; the deuce is in it

if we don't manage. Why, old warrior, rouse yourself for the battle : with an extra £200,000 we shall be rich enough. Don't be cast down in any way."

"What will you do first, you best and most generous of men?"

"I'll go and see Bevan," said Reginald very resolutely. "I will go and see what I think of the man."

"Do so," said the General. "I had best tell Snizort of your resolution, I suppose?"

"Yes : the question is how much more you ought to tell him—it is a difficult problem. I may have to sacrifice everything ; but if matters go wrong he must be warned in time. He is an awful nuisance, but he is very frank and honest. The first thing to do is to execute the deed of partnership. See to that above all things."

And so Reginald went out on foot, saying to himself, "If we do not mind Theodorides and Bevan, we shall all die in the work-house." He went to call on Mr. Bevan, but Mr. Bevan was not at home ; he therefore left his card.

CHAPTER XLV.

TWO WORTHIES ; OR, OLD FRIENDS WITH A NEW FACE.

JAMES MURDOCH and his long-lost cousin, Simpson the forger, sat comfortably together in the apartments of the former in Piccadilly. These excellent gentlemen were at breakfast, on admirable terms with themselves and the world. From the breakfast before them, and the various things to drink on the breakfast-table, a close observer of human nature would have concluded that both gentlemen were in the habit of taking quite as much stimulant as was good for them overnight, if not a little more.

"I was infernally cut last night," said George Simpson ; "but I won like blazes. Give me the curaçoa again, James, before you begin business."

"Now don't mop up more than another glass, cousin, because I want to talk seriously to you."

"Well, then, give me a cigar, and then I shall be as sound as a bell. Now fire away."

"I am going," said James Murdoch, *alias* Mr. Bevan, the

great American financier, who, without his blue spectacles, looked an extremely handsome scoundrel of between forty and fifty, "to go into a general review of all our joint affairs."

"And I," said George Simpson, otherwise Count Theodorides, who, with his dyed and beautifully-curled moustaches and hair, looked not in the least like the young gentleman who had in a weak moment committed a great forgery, "am all attention. I suppose you will agree with me that some change must be made soon. We are both running the risk of detection every day, and that would be uncomfortable, to say the least of it."

"Pish," said James Murdoch, "we are so deep in that they dare not blow upon us."

"There you are wrong," said George Simpson. "The family have quietly all withdrawn from any business connected with us, and General Anders, should anything go in any way wrong, would merely set himself right with the world by becoming the injured innocent; and besides, Anders is a creature I hate—an honest man."

"He has gone pretty close to the wind in that character," said James Murdoch.

"He fancies himself one, however," said George Simpson, "which is quite as bad as if he were one for our purposes. Besides, you are in a different position from what I am. You were staying there down at Hollingscroft, at the house of that illimitable idiot, Reginald, with your own sister, Mrs. Hickson, and meeting her twenty times a day: she did not know you from Adam. The first moment I set eyes on Aunt Hester, she knew me, and a fine cock-and-bull story I had to make up to put her off the scent. I was surprised at her biting, but she did; and those boys, Alfred Simpson and Lionel Murdoch, took the whole story in also; though if their fathers ever met me, I should be blown upon at once. I tell you that I consider my sacred person in danger, and that I intend to realise and *vamos the ranche*. London is very nice, but Vienna is much nicer."

"I would not cut partnership yet, old boy," said James Murdoch. "Remember when we met in New York. You, the Greek merchant, were devilishly out at the elbows, while I had made money in a certain ring; and had not only money, but credit. Remember that."

"I do remember," said George Simpson. "You were devilish kind to me, I allow. But do let us get out of it soon. Let me be an honest man again. Let me put my foot upon my native heath, and my name be Dickinson. Let me be quit of this humiliating disguise, and appear in a red wig and a wooden leg,

if necessary. Let me once more be free to meet the eyes of my fellow-creatures without a blush."

"Don't talk nonsense," said James Murdoch. "We can do much better than vamposing. Why did we come here at all?"

"We came here on an exceedingly foolish errand, relating to a supposed second will of old Digby's; and you have discovered that it does not exist."

"I know that it does. But you are not putting the case truly; we came here first to force on a settlement under the old will, and take our chance of our share from the honour of the two families."

"I got my part done there," said George Simpson.

"Capitally; but glass turns bullets, and your fool was a fool in every respect. If he had imitated the cry of a British female in distress, he would have had the old idiot outside in one instant, and then, you know——"

"Well, I am very glad it did not succeed," said George Simpson, downright.

"Then," continued James Murdoch, without heeding him, "our plan was to get possession of this will, and make a grand bargain out of it. I discovered that it had been removed, and, until this morning, I thought myself sold."

"I don't believe in it," said George Simpson.

"I do, however," said James; "and I will tell you why directly. Meanwhile, I, through my reputation for finance, got myself and you introduced to that ass, General Anders, and I think that you will allow that we have made a good thing of it."

"So much so that the will may go to the devil as far as I am concerned," said George Simpson.

"Yes; but you are in with me, old fellow, and I must really trouble you to stay in. Our interests are precisely identical."

"The death of this cub, George, may make a difference certainly."

"The cub is not dead," said James Murdoch. "Clumber got hold of him, and got him planted in the bush—for what reason he is not likely to tell me. The thing will be known all over London in three weeks; and, meanwhile, he is coming to London to try a bargain with me first."

"Who is this Clumber?"

"That old sinner, don't you know? Why, that man Thomas, who used to keep the house for the Duchess, and was transported for robbing the Duke years ago. He knew the trick of the shutters of that empty room, which that arch-idiot, Anders, keeps shut up, and he got in—a baby might get in—and, from what he over-

heard from the old couple, laid his hand on the right paper, and decamped."

"When did he do that?"

"When he was last in England. He had tried a bargain with me long before, but I could not find the cash, and it fell through. I did not know the whole truth then—he lied so; and not finding himself comfortable in England, and being at that time in a state of muddle, he went back to Australia with his secret. He has done well out there, it seems; but he is an undecided fool, and I have no doubt that I shall make a bargain with him; in which case, of course, we dictate our terms to the family."

"Some people are too clever by half," said George Simpson. "Suppose this wonderful will was to go against our claims?"

"If it did he would hardly offer to make a bargain with *me*. I suspect that it puts the Hethereges in a far worse position than it does you or I."

"But the document will not be worth much after so many years," said George Simpson: "much better sell out and go."

"I shall see it and decide," said James. "It will probably lead to a compromise in which we shall certainly take a very large sum of money. What I want is for you to wait and see. If you *vamos*, things will come to a smash; I want you to wait and see what we can make out of this business."

"Very well," said George Simpson, "I will wait. But with that frankness which is so agreeable in families, and which has been practised so long in ours, I think that you are no better than a fool. Your whole plan appears to me to be mops and brooms. We have done thundering well by finding such gulls on the wing as Anders and Snizort. In my opinion we had better clear out; we have run fearful risks together, and I am getting rather sick of it. You don't seem to see that by concealing this will you commit a cool felony. Oakum is very nasty to the fingers, and those new cells in Coldbath Fields are, as I am told, exquisitely uncomfortable."

So Count Theodorides went out for a walk whistling. He was dressed most perfectly, and looked like a bridegroom, when he came into Storr and Mortimer's. The eminent Greek merchant had an interview with one of the partners, to their mutual satisfaction. The financier simperingly let the jeweller know that he was about to contract a matrimonial alliance, and wanted some diamonds. He selected £14,000 worth, and paid for them with a cheque on the spot, remarking casually that he was not certain of his exact balance at Glyn's, and said that he would wait while one of their clerks stepped round with the cheque. "We never

know," he said, "how we may stand at any particular moment. I give you my word," he added, laughing, "that I was actually overdrawn at Drummond's the other day. It was extremely amusing, but an actual fact." The partner laughed heartily at the absurdity of the great Count Theodorides being overdrawn anywhere; but it was a remarkable fact that the diamonds remained in his hands until the clerk returned with the money; after which, rumour said that he winked at his head clerk, and in the course of the afternoon sent a private note to Messrs. Howell and James, receiving for answer that Count Theodorides had bought diamonds to the extent of £8,000 there that afternoon, and had paid for them like a gentleman. Drawing about £6,000 more out of two banks, he reluctantly left £2,000 in the hands of the London and County Bank, not because he would not have drawn it out, but because he arrived there after the bank was shut, and the Scotch train to Edinburgh, then not so very long established, started at eight, and he did not intend to wait till next day. From Leith to Rotterdam, with a passport from the Lord Provost, then from Rotterdam to Hamburg, was not a journey which took very long even then. Delaying in the neighbourhood of that pleasant city until a ship started for New York, he went on board of her, and at last turned his back upon an ungrateful Europe with about £28,000 of convertible property in his pockets, leaving his commercial liabilities in England to take care of themselves. He was of a humble and contented spirit, and left others to suffer those evils which are inseparable from inordinate avarice.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JAMES MURDOCH MAKES HIS RESOLUTION.

SUCH an extremely important and agreeable man as Count Theodorides was very soon missed from the commercial circles which he adorned, and where everything about him was popular except his credit. Reginald's open partnership with General Anders certainly counterbalanced to some extent the disappearance of Theodorides, but the credit of certain great speculators was extremely lowered by it, and people began to sell out in the most ominous manner.

Bevan was very cheerful over the matter, but in reality was

desperately savage about it; and it is very probable that violence would have been done had he met Simpson in a safe place. Still, he was tolerably secured for the future, having a pretty warm nest. The thing which exasperated him was, that had Simpson stayed on he might have done better. He only awaited the arrival of Clumber to decide on his future action.

He went to meet that gentleman the day he landed, and they had a long and intimate talk together. Neither would trust the other, and James Murdoch found that a sea voyage, combined with the absence of a furious and ill-tempered wife, and the companionship of an amiable daughter, had very much changed Clumber for the worse, according to Murdoch, though possibly some might think slightly for the better.

"I got an interesting letter from you from Australia," began James Murdoch.

"Well, it was a foolish letter to have written," said Clumber, "and I am sorry I wrote it. I said too much; but I was always frank and honest in my dealings. Well, what have you to say about it now?"

"Do you know the contents of the paper you have in your possession?" said Murdoch.

"It is not in my possession," said Clumber.

"There you lie, of course," said Murdoch. "I wonder you take the trouble to do it."

"I do not lie," said Clumber. "If I did you could beat me at it."

"Well, we will not quarrel," said Murdoch. "Do you know the contents of this paper, or do you not?"

"Yes I do."

"Is it favourable to me?"

"That you must decide. On the whole, I should say yes; you must judge about that for yourself, when you have read it."

"How soon will that be?"

"When you have paid me £10,000 for the privilege."

"But I don't know what is in it."

"You can't tell till you have read it."

"You want to break with me entirely, I see," said James.

"I don't say that. I only want £10,000 for a sight of it. That is my only offer. It is worth every penny of that to others, and I give you till to-morrow."

"Where shall I meet you to-morrow to see it?" said James.

Clumber named the place—a tavern near Piccadilly, extremely public, and refused to name any other, so James was forced to be contented.

When he was alone in the street he began thinking very deeply. "I am by no means sure that Simpson was not right when he called me an ass. I came over here, years ago, to see whether anything could be done with this old rascal Thomas, now Clumber, whom I knew to have information for some years. He refuses to deal, and goes back to Australia. I came here to try and find out something for myself, and utterly fail, but get in connection with Anders and do well with my talents. I am safe—I am unrecognised—no one knows who I am but this old Thomas. I have a good mind to realise, and leave the whole matter of the will alone. I can get out of the principal things perfectly well now Reginald has come to back up Anders. I certainly ruin them both; but that can't be helped. I don't see anything to prevent my openly selling out every single penny. I am not actually fraudulent, like Simpson, who never knew how to keep the right side of the hedge, as I always do, and who consequently has had to sneak away like a thief for fear of his accounts coming into court. No, I shall denounce Simpson for swindling me, and get out with all comfort myself. That will be the best way. I will come Bevan, the scrupulous financier, over them; I will expose Simpson to my own honour and glory."

CHAPTER XLVII.

RUIN.

REGINALD sat in his study in Bolton Row late on the night of the day when the above-mentioned interview between James Murdoch and old Clumber had taken place. It was a wild, wet night, with such weather as often comes in the middle of July. Cold driving squalls of wind and rain swept round the corners of the streets, and made the buffeted passengers giddy with the stinging on their faces and the booming of the wind on their ears. It was a desolate night, with a hundred ghosts in every gust: a night for a long walk and a contention with the elements, and then a brisk fire.

Reginald had a fire, and sat before it listening to the wind. His was a comfortable room, and the light of candle and fire shone pleasantly on everything around; yet Reginald cared no more for the fire than he did for the wind. A highly honourable letter was in his hand, and the crash was as good as come. Mr. Bevan, in

a kind, almost affectionate letter to Reginald, announced that he was about to withdraw from all speculations in England, and invest more largely in America. He also, in a friendly way, said that he believed that Lord Snizort was going to realise, and that he knew him to be thoroughly suspicious since the disappearance of Theodorides.

Why many words? The letter meant practically that General Anders and he were left entirely alone, and almost certainly ruined. If Bevan and Snizort had held firm, there was a chance, with Reginald's talents, that they would have pulled through; but Bevan had deserted, and the great name of Snizort was no more a tower of strength. Nothing was left save two weary and penniless old men to hide their heads, and die if possible without disgrace.

He was very sorry for Anders, far more than for himself. Anders had been such a noble, generous friend to him and to everybody. Latterly his mind had gone a little wrong about money matters, and he had done things which he might never have done had he thought twice; but it was all over now. He was very old, and this news would kill him; then the film which had come over his eyes would be removed for ever, and the soul would shine out after death with a brilliancy greater than had ever emanated from it on earth.

Alas, poor General! was ever story sadder than his? after such a career to die in poverty, nay, possibly in disgrace. It did not matter to Reginald now the boy was gone: he had been used to it all his life. "I," he thought, "have never known honour of any kind. I had riches once, but they were a misery to me. All I love are provided for—Hester and Mary are well off. I do not care at all. I have been in the way ever since I was born, and whether I go out of the world rich or poor is of very little consequence. But Anders is different. Yes, Anders is very different. The sooner he knows it the better. He had far better know it to-night."

He went downstairs, knowing where he should find the General. He was sitting before a lamp, reading. Reginald entered the room so quietly that the General did not hear him.

He was sitting in the old, old room where Digby had last seen his relations, where he once, a beautiful boy, had sat on his father's knee—where William Hetheridge had said to him, "My boy, if you ever want a friend come to me." He sat there now, an old man, and William Hetheridge's grandson was in the room to tell him that he was ruined and must die in poverty.

Reginald felt the situation more keenly than he had ever felt

anything in his life since the loss of Charles, or the news of the boy's death. Could not the bitter blow come from any hand but his? Was God always to afflict him through those he loved best? There sat the noble old man, handsome still, with the drooping grey moustache and the white short-cropped hair. His head was erect still; but the hand benefited ten times over by the old man's generosity was upraised in the dark to inflict a blow upon it which would smite it down to rise no more.

Yet it must be done. Perhaps it had better be done by his hand than by the hand of a stranger. Reginald advanced within the light of the lamp, and laid his hand on the General's shoulder.

"I know that hand well," said the General. "How well one knows the hand of a friend who brings good news."

"Anders, my old friend—my kind friend, be a man. We are ruined!"

The General put down his book, and looked up into Reginald's face.

"I am glad you brought the news, Reginald. I had a feeling about it, because everything seemed to be going so well. Will many go with us?"

"Oh, no one. I will answer for that."

"Then you must try to forgive me, Reginald. I was insane when I let you sign that deed of partnership. I had hopes that you might have saved things for us. Is all gone?"

"Everything, I fear."

"Reginald, say you forgive me. If you will only say that, I will never complain at all. I have been an evil friend for you, my poor fellow. I have done no good in this world. Only say that you forgive me, and I will face facts with you, and go through everything with a bold heart."

"I have nothing to forgive," said Reginald. "I have no feeling in my heart toward you but the most profound sorrow and compassion. You have always been the most sincere and constant friend I ever had. Forgive!—I have nothing to forgive. I say it ten times over."

"I do not ask you if there is any hope," said the General. "I know there is none. How has it happened so suddenly?"

"Snizort and Bevan are going to withdraw."

"H'm. *We* might have withdrawn, and left them in the lurch, if I had taken your advice sooner. Well, Reginald, I have ruined you, and you have not one word of anger for me."

"You are putting the case wrongly," said Reginald. "But you fully realise the fact that we are both utterly broken men."

"Yes. It is a lamentable pity about this house. My sister will break her heart about it. It is mine, you know, and it must go."

"I fear so."

"Shall we have enough to live on?" said the General.

"That I cannot say. I fear not. I fear that we are dipped so that it will be a bankruptcy."

"All your powers of finance will not stop that?"

"Not with honesty, I fear. We may compound; but affairs are very intricate."

"And you do not complain?"

"No. I have no complaint. Of whom should I complain? Certainly not of you."

They sat silent for a long time, and amidst all the rich furniture of the dead merchant, the ghosts, of which the old couple here, lonely so long, used to speak, seemed as though they moved again.

The Duke and Duchess were away; there was no one in the house awake but themselves and the hall porter. The wind had ceased, but the rain was coming down more strongly, and the footfalls in Bolton Row, getting less and less frequent, were rendered less audible than usual by the dripping of the water from the eaves and spouts, which confused themselves with the footfalls, and seemed to mock and mimic them.

"Those old people," said Anders, lighting a cigar, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, "used year after year to watch for my footfall in that street. One will come to-night, not mine; one will come to you; and then, quiet as you are, and nobly as you have behaved, you will rise and curse me."

His mind was evidently affected, but Reginald let him be, and smoked also. He wished that he would go to bed, and he urged it on him; but he got nothing but an emphatic "No," and they sat on and listened to the footfalls passing: some swift, some slow, some hesitating, some resolute, until, at last, there came a footfall swifter than the others, running on the pavement and in the roadway, splashing in the rain pools. It paused at the door, and there was a hesitating knock, to which the door was at once opened. The footfall came bounding up the stairs; some one burst open the door, and there, in the lamplight, stood the dead George with the rain-drops in his curls, looking about for Reginald with parted lips.

"Now will you curse me?" shouted General Anders, standing up and raising his hand on high. "Now will you tell me that you wish I had lain dead among the Spanish vineyards before you

set eyes on me? Do you see I have not only ruined you, but I have ruined one whom you love better than yourself. I have taken from over your head the pleasant home which you had prepared for him, and left him in the most important time of his life a beggar. Curse me now, Reginald; and I will never reply, Reginald."

The boy's head was on Reginald's bosom, pressed close against a heart from which no curses ever came. The moment was intensely bitter, and intensely sweet also. For the first time in his life Reginald was physically overcome. Trying to stretch a hand out to the General, he fell heavily on the floor, like a dead man.

"I have done well by this man," said the General, "for I have killed him."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A PAUSE.

THE General had known of George's safety all the afternoon, and of his having come in a certain ship from which he had landed at Portsmouth. Bevan had also written to him a similar note to that which he had sent to Reginald. He had seen that matters were come to a crisis, and he was in hopes that Reginald would have gone to bed without a conversation. He was actually certain that the boy would come on that evening, and he wanted Reginald to have one happy night before he broke the desperate intelligence to him. Finding that Reginald was as well informed as himself, he had still not heart to speak, but sat in his bitter misery until the boy should come. Now it was all over, and he was bending over Reginald, who lay cold and pale before him.

He put his hand upon his heart. The palpitations were very strong, but irregular. He sent the boy for the hall porter, who raised his head. They got him wine, and by degrees revived him. When he sat up he called for the boy, who came at once to him, dazed and frightened.

"I don't care much now," he said; "I have got *him*. General, old fellow, we shall be quite right now. We will manage somehow. I have been ill for the first time in my life. My heart seemed to stop all in one moment. We must keep this perfectly quiet," he added with great emphasis. "*It won't do to*

have it known just now. I have given the boy's mother money, too, lately; I am not certain how the law stands: they might take it from her if the worst came to the worst, and we made a bad composition. All these things must be seen to, and I must live to see to them. If this gets about it will play the mischief with us, and confuse matters entirely. Don't any of you say anything about it."

There came a thundering knock at the door, and the porter went away.

"That is the Duchess," said Reginald. "Give me my cravat. Don't tell her or the Duke; they are good people, but they might talk. Say nothing to them of anything at present."

The Duke and Duchess came from their last party, and reeled with astonishment at seeing George. Down went Isabel's grand cloak on the floor; down went her fan; down went her scent bottle. The Duke, on the other hand, seized George and covered him with kisses after the French manner. The two good souls were perfectly overwhelmed with joy. Isabel was the first of them who spoke any sense.

"Does his mother know?" she asked. "No! Why, then, who will break it to her? Would it not be better for George and I to start at daybreak? Why, of course it would. I will take him down. But meanwhile we must hear the whole story. She will die of joy unless it is broken to her. Reginald, you look very ill; had you not better go to bed?"

"Yes; I am not very bright," said Reginald. "Anders and the boy will see me to bed; and so, good-night."

An hour passed in Reginald's bedroom in explanations. The boy told his whole story about his bush adventure, and then it came out that he had sailed home in the very ship which brought Clumber and his daughter; and moreover, that George seemed very violently in love with that young lady, which was, seeing that he was only a boy of seventeen, somewhat amusing. His grandfather and General Anders made great fun of him on this point, and George, having no idea that anything was wrong, beyond his grandfather's having fainted, expressed his determination of marrying that young lady as soon as he was of age, and if she said yes, when he asked her.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ADA IS A MATCH FOR JAMES MURDOCH.

THERE is no doubt that Clumber intended a great deal of vague villainy about a certain discovery which he had made. Having lived in the house in Bolton Row for so many years, he knew everything about it. And he had overheard the old couple speak very often of the document which they had witnessed the night before the death of the merchant Digby, and which they believed to be a new will, or, at least, some document of very great importance. This was the document about which they communicated with General Anders after Vittoria, in case of their death. For the first time General Anders knew that a certain room in the house was closed at the merchant's desire, and that the document was supposed by the old people to be there. In another paper they had sent to him, in his father's hand, there were hints of something dark and terrible, quite sufficient to make a bolder man than General Anders hesitate to enter the room; and as years went on, hesitation grew to dislike, dislike to horror. What the old couple actually knew in detail was buried in their graves, but it was quite enough, as we have seen, to make them carry out their master's dying wish, and to conceal the room by any artifice in their power, and keep the secret among as few as possible.

Thomas Morris, now Mr. Clumber, had got hold of the secret of the last document, and had known where it was put in the old man's drawers. He had, quite late in life, possessed himself of it by opening an iron shutter which every one would have thought secure, and had, since that time, held it as a kind of stock-in-trade to be bargained for some day or another, with some one of the innumerable claimants in Chancery, he cared not which. Latterly, since he had, by the very old ruse of changing his name, got rid of the convict taint, at least in his own person, he had been doing extremely well, and did not care to trouble about the matter. But in an evil hour for him he married the beautiful and accomplished lady whom we have previously met—greatly to his deterioration as far as she was concerned, but greatly to his amelioration as far as her pretty and really charming daughter was concerned.

In an evil moment he confided to his wife that he knew something about the great lawsuit which would put quite another face on it. By degrees she got it out of him, and inflamed his brain

with schemes of potential wealth, of which he could never have dreamt for himself. A man of utterly undecided purpose, who had drunk a great deal in early and middle life, he had not one clear scheme, such as his wife would have carved out for him, and executed too, if need were, but a dozen confused ones. Every one of his own schemes about this miserable document was feasible, and without great danger; every one of his wife's was highly dangerous, and the most of them impossible.

He never had even the pluck to carry away the document out of England. During that period of his life when he indulged habitually in strong drinks, he had determined plans about it; but they were never carried out. A great criminal would have made money out of it years before; a small criminal—he never could make up his mind about it. It was in one of his moods of indecision that he got possession of George's person, with what feeble results we have seen.

It was more accident than design that threw George on board the same ship with Clumber and his daughter. There were few ships for Europe in those days, and both requiring to go to Europe at the same time they could hardly have avoided such an accident had they wished it, which none of them certainly did; in fact, it was a very pleasant arrangement for all parties.

Ada and George were very much together on deck, and very great confidence existed between them. He was the first gentleman she had ever been with, and his conversation was so fresh, frank, and intelligent, that it became a necessity to her. The poor girl seemed to live in a different atmosphere when she was with him, and she determined to possess herself thoroughly of her stepfather's confidence.

It was not difficult: her influence over him was all for good, and now he was away from his savage wife it had great effect. Besides, old and battered as he was, the ministrations of such a really charming daughter were extremely pleasant and soothing. It was not very long before the girl knew almost as much as her father did, and emphatically determined to use it for her own purposes, that is to say, for the benefit of her young friend.

She opened the trenches on her father very cautiously, but she had a good time for her siege, for a three months' voyage then was not by any means an uncommon thing. Always pleasant in her conversation, she spoke now to him about subjects of which she never heard at home. We do not mean to say that she enlisted religion in her cause, her instincts were too good to do such a thing as that; the idea of using sacred subjects for worldly ends, however innocent, would not have seemed to her justifiable, more particu-

larly as she might have to tread on some extremely doubtful ground. Her talk was of quiet peaceful subjects, and above all of a happy and virtuous old age, unclouded by anything which might weigh heavily upon his conscience. He listened to her by no means unwillingly, and she got more and more into his confidence as the voyage went on.

At last he told her plainly that he had deeply committed himself to James Murdoch, who knew his history, and that it would be extremely difficult to back out. He had written to James Murdoch, who was in London under a false name, some weeks ago, and he was afraid of his vengeance if he played fast and loose with him. The girl asked him point blank what James Murdoch could possibly do to him.

The question was a puzzling one, and he had never faced it before. The clear, honest purpose of the girl gave a clearness to her intellect, and made it of vast use to him. She dwelt on that point: what could James Murdoch do to him, after all?

He told her that he was capable of anything; that he had once, at least, compassed Reginald's death; that he was a swindler and a scoundrel, and would fight to the very last. She let that question go by for a time.

She pointed out to him that now for many years he had been groping with a weak, undecided hand, through crooked ways, and that a great opportunity had arisen for putting himself right by a frank surrender of his powers. "You want money for your secret," she said; "of what use is money to you except to be a burden and misery to you in your old age? You have as much as you want, that you have gained honestly. Why now make it more by dishonesty? Why try for more money, at least in this way?"

"Your mother, my dear, would like it, and you would marry better."

"My mother is not to be trusted with money: she has never made a good use of it. As for me, I tell you fairly that I can never marry. My origin would prevent my ever marrying a gentleman, and after my association with this boy, whom I love like a brother, I most certainly cannot endure the society of a man in our set. I do not intend to return to Australia at all. Pray dismiss both my mother and myself from your thoughts. You have been a kind stepfather to me, and sooner than see you run into new danger for my sake, I myself would go straight to Reginald Hetherage, and tell him what I know."

"Which is nothing in reality, my love, and which would lead me into great trouble."

“ True ; I was speaking too fast. But this James Murdoch, if he is the swindler you say he is, turn the tables on him. Threaten to expose him unless he leaves the country ; then take your secret to Reginald Hetherige like a man. Say I meant to do so and so, but I have repented of it. The document is of value to you ; if you approve of my conduct make me a present to satisfy my wife. If you give me nothing, give me at least the credit of acting straightforwardly in my old age. I have eaten the bread of the house of Digby for many years. I am not far from the grave, and I wish to make reparation for what I did so many years ago.”

These arguments, repeated many times, had overwhelming effect at last. The pleasant company of George also had much to do with the result possibly. At all events, the battle was won before the voyage was over. The only stipulation which the old man made to Ada being that he should break with James Murdoch in his own way.

What his way was we have seen. Half afraid of his man, he imposed an impossible condition. James Murdoch gave the business up, and retired from the speculation, setting to work publicly to sell out everything in which he was interested in common with General Anders and Reginald. He suffered very little in pocket, for the different speculations were by no means in a bad odour as yet, being, on an average, at par, some over, some under. Things which he had come into for a song were worth twice what they were at first, it must be owned, partly by his masterly talent of puffing and promoting, though mainly by the great names of Anders and Reginald, the former of whom had the character of being one of the cleverest men in Europe, and the luckiest. The latter, too, being known to have made a very large fortune out of absolutely nothing, which was in some quarters a great recommendation, though not so great a one in others.

One little cloud remained on James Murdoch's horizon. If that old rascal, Clumber, would not come to terms, he must be silenced as to his (James's) identity. James calculated this “ raw ” on him would be about two thousand pounds. He would have put the old man out of the way had it not been dangerous in this country, and he thought, unnecessary. He therefore gave up his mind to realising with remarkable rapidity, and Lord Snizort followed suit with great promptitude. Things looked more and more ruinous for General Anders and Reginald. A sounding smash in those quarters was most undoubtedly pending.

CHAPTER L.

BREAKING UP.

REGINALD worked night and day with Anders and by himself, but it seemed to be no use whatever. They warned all the pleasant little set at Hollingscroft that the house was gone from over their heads; but Mary did not care, for she had got her boy. Mrs. Hickson did not care, for her husband was coming home. Aunt Hester discovered that the place was damp, and that it bored her—the old house in Fitzroy Square was far preferable. She opined that there would be plenty of room for them all there, and why on earth they ever came to this ridiculous Hollingscroft she could not conceive. She should only be too glad to get out of it. “What do you say, little maid?” she asked Emily Hickson, lately a great favourite of hers. “Will you not be happier in Fitzroy Square?”

“Oh, far happier; and Mr. Hetherage, I am sure, will be glad to get back to his old town life, instead of being bothered with these stupid country people. *Mark my words,*” said the young lady, “they will, if we stay here, come sympathising with Mr. Hetherage about losing his money, as they did when we thought George was drowned. I can only say that if any of them take the unwarrantable liberty of sympathising with *me*, I shall slap their faces, and so I don’t deceive them. *If* the General and Mrs. Hetherage have lost their money it is the duty of all of us to rally round them in a phalanx, and prevent audacious people from letting them hear any more about it. I suppose it is a misfortune for them to lose their money, but while they had it they made us very happy with it. What we must do is to prevent their suffering from the sympathy and compassion of their fellow-men. Whatever errors they may have committed, they have not deserved *that*. While they are among us they will be kept cheerful and made happy, not driven wild by sympathy. I put it to you, as sensible people, who could ever endure the sympathy of the Snizorts? I should go mad myself, and send Lady Snizort’s ridiculous old bonnet flying on to the top of the fire.”

But in spite of Emily’s manifesto, she slipped into Aunt Hester’s bed that night, and, when she had done crying, had a long talk with her. Whatever they or the others might say, they loved Hollingscroft dearly, and it was a bitter blow for them to leave it. Still it must be done, and they all agreed that General Anders and Reginald were the first people to be thought about.

Goodge, who was going off by the night-train to London, applauded Emily highly before she went to bed, getting her alone in the picture gallery. "My dear," he said, "you must forget every word I said to you once. You are behaving most nobly. Yet if I were to speak to you much, I know you would cry. Are you so very sorry over this matter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Because we have lost the house?"

"Yes, for I loved it dearly; but more on other grounds."

"Selfish, I fear," said Goodge.

"Yes, entirely selfish. I am sorry for the General, I am sorry for Mr. Hetherage; but think of that boy. We shall be separated now, and what will he ever do without *me*? That Australian girl will never be to him what I should have been. He will bitterly find his mistake in choosing her instead of me, when it is too late. I would have been a mother to that boy; but all you men are exactly alike. I may live to be a second mother to his children. It is all I hope for now."

CHAPTER LI.

THE CLOSED ROOM IS OPENED.

GOODGE had been summoned to London by what was a rare thing in those days—a telegram. Generally, before the Crimean war, those now familiar documents used to burst into a house like a shell, and frighten every one nearly out of their mind; they generally in those times foreboded death, dangerous illness, or the sudden stoppage of a bank. The quiet people who now send their shilling's worth to say that they shall not be home to dinner till after the soup, have no idea of the effect of those missives in old times. Goodge got one telling him to be in town without fail the next day, shortly after noon, to meet Reginald at the Reform Club, and he started, perfectly certain that something new had occurred, but not in the least degree surprised. As he was totally disassociated from all human speculations, and as any matter which might have arisen could be no earthly business of his in any way whatever, he concluded that he was called in as arbitrator in something or another of which he was profoundly ignorant. We have seen certain potentates in the same position.

Goodge resembled some of those potentates in one thing, he was determined to arbitrate on one particular side, if he should be called on to arbitrate at all.

Reginald met him on the steps of the Club, and they lunched together. Goodge noticed that Reginald was singularly reticent, and would not talk about his affairs or prosperity in any way. After lunch General Anders came.

He looked fearfully old and anxious; but quite calm. He said—

“ Goodge, do you know why we sent for you ? ”

“ Of course I do not.”

“ We have singular and most remarkable intelligence,” said the General. “ It is extremely probable that the great law-suit will come to an end within a month.”

“ Aye ! ” said Goodge, fairly astonished.

“ We think so ; but we want your kind common sense to help us. We have heard much which will entirely surprise you ; but before anything is told to you, I want you as a witness to attend Reginald and myself to open the closed room in Bolton Row.”

“ I am at your service,” said Goodge ; and they walked away through the streets together.

“ We shall know the secret now,” said General Anders. “ I have been weak, knowing as much as I have known, not to make myself master of the truth before. But I had awful reasons for leaving matters alone. Nothing induces me to act now but a sense of duty ; the *dénouement* may kill me ; but I have lived long enough.”

“ I expect we shall find,” said Goodge, “ that there is nothing the matter after all. Mind, I only suspect it, only don't prepare a tragedy and give us a farce after all these years.”

“ They have been bitter, dark years to me,” said the General.

“ You will brighten your remaining ones by finding the truth,” said Goodge.

No more was said. They went up to the third storey in Bolton Row, and into the back room, the room which opened into the concealed one.

The Duke and Duchess were there, both looking very grave. Two other people were there, an old man, Clumber, and his beautiful daughter. The latter both rose, as Anders, Reginald, and Goodge, came in, and remained standing.

“ We will all sit down, if you please,” said the Duke, “ and talk of perfectly indifferent matters for a time. Some gentlemen have yet to arrive, and to witness a very curious statement, which Mr. Clumber is about to make to us. They will not be very long,

I know. They very naturally desired witnesses on their part, and one of them has gone to seek General Anders, your namesake, my dear General, and the other Mr. Morley."

They sat there rather awkwardly; the Duchess sat beside Ada Clumber and kept her hand in hers. The girl's other hand was in her father's. She was very pale, but looked resolute and calm. The old man sat close to her, strong in his resolution. Reginald went and talked to them both, kindly and with animation. General Anders sat apart, and would speak with no one.

The door opened, and there were ushered in old General Talbot, young Simpson, young Murdoch, General Anders (our General's namesake), and Mr. Morley. Then the door was shut, and Reginald, when every one had bowed to the other, spoke.

"I think, Mr. Clumber, that the time has come for you to speak, and to open all eyes to a matter which might have been known long ago, and which might have saved us all from a great deal of trouble if it had been discovered. Speak without fear of offence, sir; whatever your life may have been, you have now ample time to make atonement for anything you have done. Gentlemen, I am bound to say that Mr. Clumber has, in this latest act of his life, behaved like an honest man."

Clumber rose and spoke while they all sat silent.

"I am a very old man, gentlemen, and I have a deal to answer for; but my daughter here has been talking to me a good deal, and I am determined to make a clean breast of the whole matter. I came to England, gentlemen, for the purpose of making a bargain about what I know with Mr. Bevan."

"With Mr. Bevan?" said Reginald; "what had he to do with it?"

"Mr. Bevan, sir, is James Murdoch; and Count Theodorides is George Simpson, the forger," said the old man quietly, and every one looked at every one else. Young Murdoch and young Simpson did not appear to be half as much astonished as might have been anticipated.

"That is the state of the case, gentlemen. Well, on the voyage my daughter here—she ain't my daughter, but a better daughter than one in a thousand—she takes me in hand. She points out to me that I am old and not poor, and that I can never die happy with this on my mind. Consequently I determines to do what is right. If you gentlemen choose to make my wife a present for my thwarting her *and* doing what is right, why it will save words and worse. But I want you to understand that my daughter's words have took effect with me, and that I am doing

what is right because it *is* right and not wrong. Consequently I tell you that merchant Digby made a will subsequent to that which was found, proved, and bedevilled, till his original will, in which he left his whole property to the devil, might just as well have been carried out in full, according to his original instructions. That second will, in which the devil was not so much as mentioned once, was witnessed by the Dickers the night after he spoke in Parliament for the last time, and on the night before he died. How much General Anders knows of that will I cannot say at all."

"I swear to you, my friends, that I merely suspected that the document was a will, but nothing more. I knew that there was some document in there (pointing to the wall), but my father's curse, and some nameless terror which is there still, prevented my daring to look for it. I have been very weak, you must try to forgive me."

Clumber continued amidst dumb silence: "The Dickers used to speak to one another about this paper, and it was always on their consciences. The old man always told them that the opening of that room would be the ruin of the boy. So they kept on thinking of it until they were as frightened about it as he is now. They covered the door with plaster from the outside and put up iron shutters from the outside; then they made out that the old man's ghost was there, and with one thing and another they humbugged themselves, the General, and everybody but me. Living in the house as I did, I saw the shutters put up; they would not let the man go into the room, and so they were put on with simple screws from the outside. After I went wrong I always thought how easy it was to get into that room from the outside, by merely drawing the screws with a driver, I knowing that there were no nuts inside; and once when I was in England I did so. I found the paper; and I come into this house to-night to make a clean breast of it, and give that paper up."

"This man," said young Murdoch, "has communicated with all of us in the most frank manner, and I believe that he is honest in his present intentions. Still we must guard ourselves from a great fraud. If such a will exists, I think that I speak but the authority of my father, of Simpson's father, and of you General Talbot, that it will never be disputed whatsoever its provisions may be; we, however, require the stoutest proofs of its antiquity. At present we know absolutely nothing. This gentleman gives us to understand that he possessed himself of this will. Where is it, then? have you got it here?"

"I have not," said Clumber.

“Where is it, then?” said young Murdoch. “You will do yourself no good by playing with us. Where is this will? and how soon can we see it?”

“The will is in the next room, and you can see it in ten minutes if General Anders is agreeable to open the old room at last.”

“In the next room!” cried young Simpson. “Do you mean in the closed room?”

“I do. I never dared take it from there; I only hid it. If my wife knew that she would kill me. When I got in there and found it I was frightened to bring it away, and I planted it. I never was a man who could go through with anything.”

“Then you mean to say,” said General Talbot, “that the will is in there now?”

“Yes. I always calculated on getting through those shutters again, and fetching it away; but what with old age and lumbago—I mean what with my daughter’s persuasions to lead a better life—I determined to be an honest man over the matter. There is nothing between you and the will but some lath and plaster and General Anders’s permission.”

“Isabel, you had better go away,” said General Anders firmly; and Isabel went.

“Now, gentlemen,” said General Anders, “I suppose after what has passed that you will require me to open this room?”

“General,” said Talbot, “there is not a man in the room but what is your hearty friend. You are, it is said, ruined in pocket, but let that pass. If you are ruined, it has come about mainly by this ridiculous secret; and I tell you fairly, that from what we have heard now it *must* be solved, at whatever sacrifice to your feelings.”

“Cousin Talbot,” said the General, “you shall not have much trouble.”

“Did you say ‘cousin?’” said General Talbot.

“I did. The time is come when all of you must know what is only known at present to Reginald Hetherage, and my sister, and Mr. Goodge.”

“Your sister!” exclaimed Talbot.

“Yes,” said General Anders. “I am the son of Digby the merchant; the Duchess is his daughter also. Can you now conceive my hesitation in opening this room? Can you now understand what you must have considered my insanity about the matter? In this room lies the secret of my mother’s dishonour, and that, I fear, of Isabel’s mother also. I have been preparing to open this room for years: follow me into it, and learn with

prying eyes the secret of some crime too great for Divine mercy."

"My dear fellow," said Goodge, "I think that everybody present understands your delicacy. I am one of the few to whom you have confided your origin. Let us be practical. Let us get the wall broken down, and let us take this gentleman, Mr. Clumber, in, escorted by a Hetherage, a Talbot, a Simpson, and a Murdoch. I will go as arbitrator. Not one single paper beyond the will shall be disturbed: whatever secrets Digby left behind him are no one's property save yours and the Duchess's. Come, I was not sent for here to-night for nothing. Is that your will, gentlemen all?"

"I say yes," said General Talbot; "but I am utterly overwhelmed. Are you the 'handsome boy'?"

"I am," said General Anders. "I have kept my secret well. Do you gentleman understand and forgive me now?"

There was a general murmur of sympathy for him in the midst of their curiosity. He left the room.

"Did you know this, Reginald?" said young Murdoch.

"Of course I did. Goodge and Hester and I have known it for years."

General Anders returned with a small crowbar and a key. Five minutes sufficed to remove the lath and plaster sufficiently to allow the passage of a man. A pair of folding doors covered with cobwebs appeared beyond. General Anders fitted the key in the door, and after a few efforts made it turn; he passed into the room—the room of mystery and terror to him, and then came out, asking them to follow him and bring a light.

CHAPTER LII.

OLD DIGBY'S REAL WILL.

THE first thing which struck every one when they followed, and the room was quite illuminated, was the fact that two pictures were in extremely prominent places on each side of a tall esri-toire—those of a beautiful boy and a beautiful girl. In the face of the boy General Talbot recognised the face of General Anders who stood beneath it; in the face of the girl the Duke recognised his wife. "Yet," he thought, "she must have been a child when

the room was closed, and that is a woman of thirty; it must be her mother." There was a name under the picture, and before any one had time to read it, the Duke quietly broke off the projecting piece of plaster on which the name was written, with the crowbar, and put it in his pocket.

The room was deeply covered with dust everywhere. Only one human being had entered it for more than half a century, and that being was Clumber. He coolly came in and asked Murdoch and Simpson to look around them, and see where the dust had been disturbed. They could not see any difference anywhere, but Goodge held them back and laughed low.

"If this man speaks truth," he said, "I will find this paper without his assistance. No one has been in this room for several years; no one was in the tomb of Asifat for twenty years before I entered, yet I could trace the footsteps of Belsoni. Mr. Clumber, you came in at that window, you came straight to this desk. You trampled about it a great deal; then you went straight to the fireplace, and put the paper there; then you came back again and paused irresolutely once. Then you went back to the window. Just hold your light here, and you will see his feet in the dust, covered pretty deeply, but still pretty visible."

Now he showed it to them it was obvious enough. Goodge went to the fireplace and stood perfectly puzzled.

"Come, Mr. Clumber, I want you here; I am quite beaten."

The fireplace was an old brick one, with dogs, and with Dutch tiles spreading out on the floor. Clumber brushed the dust away from one of the Dutch tiles and raised it; he took out a paper and gave it to General Talbot. They went out, into the other room, Clumber and General Anders bringing up the rear.

"There is lots more there," he whispered to General Anders, as they lagged behind. "There is all you want to know there. That is where your father used to hide all his things, and that is why he left the will in the desk, so that it might be more easy found. I heard of his hiding-place from the old folks when I was listening. I put the will there so as no one should find it. From what I heard them tell, I should burn all the papers there if I was in your place. They are no good to you or the Duchess. He was an awful old man by all accounts. I wouldn't make or meddle with reading them if he had been *my* father." And so they passed into the lighted room and sat down.

Young Murdoch opened the will and read it to himself. "I do not suppose," he said, "speaking on my own responsibility, that it will be in the least degree likely that any member of this family will be foolish enough to dispute this. I will go further.

I do not believe that it is any one's interest to do so. The principal persons concerned in it are all well represented here; is any one dissatisfied as to its antiquity? Are we to believe this man Clumber's story, or are we not? If we do not, we must at once charge him with an impudent fraud, committed some years ago, and place him at once in the first rank of clever criminals. If we do believe his story, a very great difficulty is solved, and there will be no trouble about a compromise. The water-mark on the paper is that of 1770. The ink is brown, the date of the will is a day after the famous one."

"Look at the edges of the paper," said Goodge, "it may be torn out of some book in a public library."

"All four edges are white," said young Murdoch.

"Try it with water," said General Anders the second. "It may be forged in sepia. Let us have no humbug."

It resisted water, however. There was no doubt about its antiquity; they were all obliged to admit that.

"Then," said young Murdoch, "I should say that many lawyers will be thrown out of employment. Digby, our great relative, in this will makes proportionably nearly the same division of his property as he did in the other will; but he alters it in one remarkable manner. Instead of deferring the administration of his property to the time when every male relative alive at the time of his death should be dead, he limits the time to twenty years after his decease. I, like the rest of our family, have been sick of this long Chancery suit, and have been only waiting to move in the matter on our cousin Reginald's death. Our cousin Reginald has so greatly endeared himself to all of us, by his patience under difficulties, and his generosity during his prosperity, that I am sure the whole family would feel in his death that they had suffered an irreparable loss. If any kind of compromise can be come to under this will, it is evident to me, from the action I and my cousin Simpson took when we believed George dead, and from the inquiries we made then, that I must congratulate our cousin Reginald on the possession of at least half a million of money. It will probably, I should say, be a great deal more, and will certainly be no less. We all profit more or less by this will, the most unfortunate thing is that it will be published."

"Why so?"

"It makes General Anders and the Duchess very little richer than they were before; there is no disgrace to either of them in it, but it is a sad *exposé* of a wicked old man's life."

General Anders looked at it, and let it drop on the floor.

“I have made myself an honourable place in the world by my own exertions, and in my old age I am dragged into disgrace by my father. I have deserved it. But Isabel, she will die at having her shame published.”

“The Duchess,” said the Duke, airily and pleasantly, “is, like her brother, far too good and too noble a person to be dragged into any infamy at all. Given all this to be true, it is very bad, it is horrible, it is inconceivable, but, *ma foi*, I cannot conceive how it affects the Duchess in any way. You English have no sense. My grandfather was a notorious reprobate, and only became a political saint by being most righteously guillotined. General, my dear, you have ruined your life over the sentimental folly of your father’s sins; I pray you learn wisdom. As for the Duchess’s honour, that is in *my* keeping. Have you not had lessons enough about this nonsense? Here, through all kinds of trouble, is everything right again. Cease your restless speculations, and be happy with us.”

There was a general conversation and a general agreement on all points; at last a woman’s voice was heard, which commanded attention at once. It was the voice of Ada, the Australian girl.

“Then I understand, gentlemen, that this compromise which you are proposing does not benefit Mr. George Hetherege in any way. It is very hard upon me, for I worked for him, and for him solely.”

“And nobly too, my girl,” said Reginald. “Everything I have is his; you have done a brave day’s work. You say that it is no benefit to him; remember that I am not long for this world, and that what you have done for me you have done for him.”

The girl was contented, but the father pleaded for himself. He said that he was an honest man, and hoped they would reward him. They said that they knew nothing certain as yet; and his daughter led him away and left them talking.

CHAPTER LIII.

HOLLINGS-CROFT AGAIN.

No great difficulty occurred as regards the compromise over the great suit, except an attempt on the part of Bevan to get his share in an underhand way, which gave rise to certain complications.

The agreement of James Murdoch was formally necessary, according to his own showing; and after a wrangle, in which their strong card was the threat of exposing his real name and position, and his was stopping all proceedings, his agreement was bought for more than it was really worth, and he departed to America with his financial genius and a large sum of money.

It was everybody's interest to get the whole matter settled, and it did not take very long to do so. There was more money left than any one expected, as in the Thellusson case. Reginald was now in a splendid position as head of the family, and his financial difficulties were easily tided over by the unanimous support of the other principal members. His security secured the position of General Anders, and he quietly withdrew from all his bolder schemes with no very great loss to himself or any one else. Once more Reginald had peace before him, and laid himself out to enjoy it, and end his long and stormy life.

Hollingscroft was now unanimously pronounced to be the most delightful place in the world, and every cruel word which had been said of it was quite forgotten. The house was soon as full, as cheery, and as bright as it had ever been in its best times; every one was master there except Reginald. It pleased him very much, for he said that it would divert his mind from ordinary matters, and leave him, he said laughing, leisure to complete the great work of his life.

"And what is that?" asked Goodge.

"The history of my parliamentary career," said Reginald.

"That will be one of the great books of the future."

Goodge urged that it would tax his brain too much, and begged him to leave the materials behind him to be written after his death.

"No; but really," said Reginald, "to leave joking, I must take the Chiltern Hundreds. My presence in Parliament is too awful a scandal. I was not there fifteen times the whole of last session! You people never ought to have forced me in: I have out-heroded Herod in my cool laziness."

"Never mind," said Goodge, "you can do more in future. Don't leave Parliament, it will do you all the good in the world;" and Reginald yielded, sorely against his will, and, as usual, allowed himself to be disposed of, when he had ten thousand times better have taken his own way.

Hollingscroft was now also discovered by the county generally to be the most charming place in the whole of Dorsetshire, and Reginald to be the most popular man. He had been that once before, and did not very particularly care about it one way or

another. He, however, said now, in confidence to Aunt Hester, that if they could only quarrel with the Snizorts, there was nothing to prevent their being happy.

“My dear soul,” said Aunt Hester, “I have quarrelled with the woman violently four times, but she will make it up again. I can’t do anything with her at all.”

“Ah!” said the Duchess smiling, “if I had my old spirit I would have managed her. She is certainly intolerable—she is enough to drive one into a nunnery: I am too nervous now to fight her.” They looked at her with great sympathy, and Mrs. Hickson silently bent over her and kissed her. She was more than a daughter to her now, for a terrible shock had befallen her. In spite of every kind effort to the contrary, she had managed to see the awful will made by the godless old man just before his death. From it she learned the shameful secret of her birth and of her half-brother; she never appeared in the world any more, and left London, where she had been so popular, for ever. The Duke was devoted and unremitting in his attentions to her, more like a lover than a husband, but the cruel old man’s blow had fallen, and had fallen heavily. The Duke tried Lorraine for her, and took her to St. Privat, but the long hedgeless, treeless fields, the long military roads, and the weary drives to Briey, which was dull, and to Metz, which was noisy, bored her; and the Duke very soon got tired of it himself, and at the first faint signal from her brought her back to England. She would not face Paris now, for she supposed that everybody would know all about her. This worthy couple settled permanently in England close to Hollingscroft, to be near her brother; for he never left that place now. Nearly sixty years of honour and excitement had very much aged him, and the dreadful blow inflicted on him by this *esclandre* about his father’s domestic relations (he had always known that his father and mother were not married, and used to consider himself a Falconbridge, but never had known the worst), entirely drove him from the world. The soldier and the dandy, the financier and capitalist, were now represented by a tall humble old gentleman with a grey moustache, who walked swiftly about the country, talking to labourers, and travelling tinkers and gipsies even, asking them curious simple questions about their trades, and always leaving them with the idea that he had made a grand discovery for improving their way of doing their trade, or their mode of life. At dinner he would expatiate with almost childish eagerness on something which a travelling chair or clock mender had told him, and enlarge on some scheme for teaching them their trade better than they knew it themselves.

At last, in his wanderings, the good old man found an old soldier, who had served with him, going to the workhouse with his wife. He stopped *that*, and came back to dinner very much flurried and nervous. He had a new scheme, which, as he told Goodge, he was determined to hammer on while the iron was hot. He had still between eighty and ninety thousand pounds left, and his scheme was to expend the whole of it on a grand almshouse which should stand between old couples going to the workhouse, as far as the money could go. "The sum is utterly insufficient," he said, "and my great age renders it absolutely necessary that I should set to work on the scheme at once, so as to attend to the details. I might have been in the workhouse myself, you know, if it had not been for you, Reginald." He was with great difficulty prevented from carrying out his scheme in its entirety, and only yielded from his profound belief in Reginald's powers of theoretical finance and Goodge's shrewdness as a man of the world. He, however, after they had pointed it out to him that he might do better with his money, and might personally superintend a smaller establishment, built an almshouse on his own plan, the care of which kept him healthily busy and fussy for the rest of his life. Reginald insisted on giving the land, and General Anders begrudgingly allowed him to do so.

Reginald's yacht, a totally useless institution, was, on the arrival home of Captain Hickson, C.B., at once taken possession of by that gallant officer, newly rigged, and newly painted. Haddensmouth was rather inclined to resent Captain Hickson's interference with their property, for the inhabitants had long considered the yacht to belong to them, and Hickson declared that she was used as a storehouse for stolen goods. It is certain that she would have been seized a dozen times over for smuggling had not the coastguard officers entertained a most wholesome fear of troubling the Haddensmouth people in any way. Captain Hickson, however, had a mortal prejudice against these people, because he was perfectly certain that some of them must have connived at the attack made on Reginald's life on the night of his arrival. He got them into excellent good order, and ruled them with a rod of iron. The scandal which the place had given rise to was removed.

The yacht, bought like a pig in a poke by Reginald, was found by Captain Hickson to be an exceedingly beautiful and valuable craft. Reginald consulted Hickson, and came to a determination about her, which he ultimately carried out, but which must be passed over now in favour of far weightier matters. The long slumbering squabble between Lord Snizort and Sir Lipscombe

Barnett had come to a culmination, and the lord lieutenant of the county, being old, nervous, and infirm, had shut himself up in his castle with a view of escaping to Italy, by the secret assistance of a staunch and loyal tenantry, until less dangerous times should dawn upon his distracted county.

The chances against the escape of the lord lieutenant to Italy were very strong. The county was out from Weymouth to Poole, and the Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire was nothing to the present war. The women, as is usual in war, were hottest over the matter, and they involved their husbands, who, like the lazy brutes they are, would gladly have kept out of it. The Archers, who were the most overwhelmingly powerful body in the county were mostly on the side of Sir Lipscombe. Very few of them joined the ranks of Lord Snizort. The first actual skirmish was at the meeting of the Dorset Toxophilites, at which the forces on both sides were present in full numbers, the Barnett faction being, however, in a strong majority. Matters assumed the form of an armed neutrality, until Mrs. Pennyfeather (Snizort), and Miss Gold (Barnett), had a violent fracas over the latter lady's score. One lady was led away by her husband, the other by her father; the two gentlemen were now committed to war. In the meantime, the lord lieutenant, having secreted himself for a time at the house of Cardinal ——— at ———, succeeded in reaching Poole, from whence he took ship to Cherbourg, and so got safely to Italy. He elected to die there, and carried out his intention some years afterwards, full of years and of honour.

The cause of the great county war was the absolute refusal of Lady Snizort to receive Mrs. George Barnett. Not only to receive her, but to enter any house where she was received. Most people would have got over the last difficulty with the greatest ease, for Lady Snizort was a terror to the county; but the Snizorts were very powerful people, and gave very great entertainments. A minority therefore rallied round the Snizorts, while the vast majority of young ladies and matrons, seeing that George Barnett was irrevocably lost, made up their minds to the theory that he had been deceived and coney-catched by an artful girl and her father, but emphatically refused to permit their husbands and fathers to quarrel with Sir Lipscombe in consequence of the shameful behaviour of his son.

The lord lieutenant was an old bachelor who used to entertain a great deal, and who, being an ancient Whig of reverent age, was politically offensive to nobody. The Snizort-Barnett affair had been at once referred to him. He, seeing no way out of it, was at once taken ill, and, ultimately, as we have seen, took refuge in Italy.

Having no other victim, the county naturally came on Reginald. If there was no other victim to be found, he was of course the man. Now the most popular man in the county, he was made arbitrator, and his foes were those of his own household.

They took various sides in the great controversy. Aunt Hester stood out boldly for the Barnetts, and was followed by the other women of the family. Reginald himself was strongly adverse to having anything whatever to do with the matter; and for a time very much longed to follow the lord lieutenant to Italy, when a disaster occurred to him which had been long foreseen. He was on the list of sheriffs for the year, and Her Majesty, not in the least degree desiring to do him any mortal injury, pricked him.

It became necessary for him to declare himself. Mrs. George and her husband were openly asked to the sheriff's ball; the Snizorts and he were deadly enemies from that time forward, and the Snizorts at once went to Persia, and stayed there a long time. Lady Snizort wore trousers and smoked, but she never parted from her bonnet or umbrella. "After all," said Reginald, "it cuts both ways—we get rid of the Snizorts, which is something, and we have offended no one of any importance. If we had, it would not be of the remotest consequence to me. I am a little too old to care for anything now; but they might have left me alone."

The changeful life which he had led, and the strange shifts in it, seemed to repeat themselves continually before his eyes in a curious manner now. Aunt Hester was exactly the same as ever, an extremely bright and lively old lady, but who had taken in her age to flowers—things she previously used to despise, and spent her time in an endless wrangle with the gardener. She had a novel on the stocks, and she showed him two volumes of it. He liked it very much, and wrote a review of it, before it was finished, in the most complimentary style. The review and the novel may both be found in their unpublished posthumous works. Mary was the same, only that she was getting a little grey, and, for the first time in her life, a little obstinate on the subject of George's going to sea again. The Duke and Duchess were the same, save that the Duke had in his old age become earnest about something, and that thing was roses, and the Duchess was backing him up through thick and thin, in opposing Aunt Hester and the gardener in their way of managing Reginald's flower-beds. Goodge was the same, except that he was a little greyer and rather more beloved by every one than even he was before. Hickson and his wife had not changed at all since the time when he was a poor captain and she a London beauty. Anders was changed a little, but very little. He was as eager and earnest now over his new scheme of the

almshouses as he ever had been over a battle or a speculation. All Reginald's friends seemed to have some hope in life except himself. He seemed to have outlived all hope or all sorrow, and to be waiting for the end.

A request was a command with him now. It always had been, but in old times he would merely acquiesce passively, now, the only activity he showed was in exerting himself to oblige other people. Mr. Owthwaite spoke solemnly to him on this point as his spiritual adviser, but he was petulant with Mr. Owthwaite over the matter, and indeed that gentleman and he never got on very well together, the clergyman saying that Reginald was ridiculously weak, and Reginald saying, in confidence to Aunt Hester, that Owthwaite was a spiritual bully. In this Sir Lipscombe Barnett entirely agreed. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe had once made it up at Reginald's expense, and retired to mourn in secret: but now that their mutual enemy, Snizort, had departed to Persia, they lived what Mrs. Quickly called "a very frampold life" together, neither of them ever saying anything which the other did not, as a Christian, a gentleman, and a Briton, find it necessary flatly to contradict on the spot and refer to Reginald as arbitrator. Reginald always arbitrated wrong in the opinion of one party, and very often in the opinion of both, so he ended his days with the opinion that the proper end for insoluble national difficulties was the old one—war. "For," he said, "arbitration gives both parties the power of making a deadly enemy of the third and innocent party, who has no earthly business in the matter at all."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

AFTER one of these arbitrations Emily Hickson came to him as he was sitting on the lawn. She had been up to London buying her clothes for the ball at which she was first to appear as a full-grown woman: that is to say, she was going to "come out." She was very pretty, and she had endeared herself to all of them by the capital way in which she had behaved during the troubles, now three years passed. She sat down at his knee.

"Mr. Hetherage," she said, "I wish I could be more to you than I am. I wish you would try me. I wish that you would make a friend of me. I am really to be trusted."

"My dear, you are my friend."

“Then I am the only one you have got,” she said, “except George and his mother. George, come here and sit by me, and let us tell him what we mean.”

George came and sat down by her upon the grass. He took one of Reginald’s hands in his, while he gave the other to Emily.

“Mr. Hetherage,” said Emily, “you have been good and kind to every one, but you have no friends who understand you as we do. Cast your eyes round on the people you have benefited so deeply; they are all good; but does any of them know you? Are you not always ‘Poor Reginald’ with them all except with Mrs. Hetherage, who went through it all with you—I mean Mary, the mother of this boy? We three never call you ‘Poor Reginald.’ To us you are Mr. Hetherage, the best, wisest, and noblest of men. From Mrs. Hetherage I have heard the story of your whole life, and it seems to me that you have always cared for others more than for yourself. I want you to think that George and I will try to do the same. The others do not understand you as we do. The reason is, I suppose, that we are children, and that you will be a child till you die.”

“Yes, my dear, I know it; I have been nothing but a child all my life. I suppose I could not help it; I never could help anything. Yes, I am a child.”

“Aye!” said the girl rising, “‘and He took one and set him in the midst of them all.’ That is what He did. Grandfather!”

“Why do you call me so, dearest?”

“Give George and me your blessing, for we are going to share the rest of our lives together.”

A bright flush, like the dying sunset on the window of a cathedral, showing a blaze of light to the outer world, but casting a heaven of jewelled glory through the darkening aisles within, shone over Reginald’s face as he blessed them. “It is all as I wished; I will die as I have lived—a child among children.”

“Take him with us,” said the brisk Emily; “we know where to find our mother, do we not, George. Come with us, child Reginald, and we will gather flowers together. Come, for there is some one to see you—the prettiest flower of them all, *I* think, and George was in love with her, and she was in love with George. Come along, my dear, no one understands you but us.”

Reginald went away with them, but more feeble in his walk than in old times. One on each side of him, the noble pleasant-faced youth, and the pretty brisk girl, gathered flowers as they passed on, and gave them to him to hold for them, petulantly telling him to be very careful of them, for that they were all for him, and that the other people who were always getting him into trouble when

they ought to have left him quiet, never attended to the flowers in his study. So they talked and prattled beside him until they came to a turn in one of the alleys before one of the windows of the hall.

Reginald knew the place well. Under the towering mass of rhododendrons before him was the grave of the bloodhound, who had died for him on the night of his first arrival at Hollingscroft. In front of the flowers, walking up and down, were his old Mary and a beautiful young lady, whom he at once recognised as Ada Honey.

"It is a strange place to meet, Miss Honey," he said. She did not understand him, but came forward and bowed to him.

"I trust that everything is well with you, Miss Honey," said Reginald.

"I am Miss Honey no longer," said that young lady. "I am happily married, and I came here to take leave of you, sir, and to thank you for all your kindness. I have married an American gentleman, and I am going to Illinois with him, taking my father; and so we shall see the weary old Australia no more for ever."

"Take this ring to him, madam," said Reginald, "and tell him that he has a jewel in his wife brighter than that stone. Good-bye. He has heard what took place here;" and so he turned away with George and Emily, not seeing the extremely anxious glance which Mary sent after him.

"My dears," he said to George and Emily, when they were alone together among the flowers, "the place where she was standing was the very place from which they shot at me. At me, who never injured a human being! The poor dog died to defend me, the only creature, before heaven, who ever risked its life for me. When I am gone, remember that dog's grave; but now let us be children among the flowers. You must carry some of these, you two, for my hands are full; but we will have plenty while we are at it, I beg of you."

In one of the garden walks, blazing with flowers, they met Captain Hickson and Goodge, who had come from the sea, and who had been dredging (in Reginald's yacht, of course). They were horribly dirty and very much excited; they had a beastly conglomeration of creatures from the bottom of the sea, never originally happy, but now in all phases of misery, ranging from fury to degradation, at being removed from the places where Divine Providence had placed them, that is to say, as far out of reach as possible. Reginald was called upon to admire these, but he laughed, and said that he was busy with the flowers. So Goodge and Hickson went home and pickled them.

“Would you like the yacht, George?” said Reginald.

George drew his breath. “I can sail her, grandpa. I don’t know what I should do if you gave me the yacht. You should not talk of such things.”

“She is yours, my dear,” said Reginald. “We will get some more flowers now, and to-morrow morning I will go and see you sail her.”

George was dumb, and even Emily shook her head as if she could not understand it. George had got a real ship of his own, none of your twopenny-halfpenny Admiralty appointments, but a real ship of one hundred tons, all his own for ever.

“I don’t think, grandpa,” he said solemnly, “that any human being ever gave any one else such intense pleasure as you have given me. Come down to Haddensmouth to-morrow morning and see me beat her out to sea. You will come, won’t you?”

“I said that no one understood him but ourselves,” said Emily. “I shall go.”

And so the three rambled home through the alleys of the garden with their flowers.

All that night the boy George, like a true man-of-war’s man, was down at Haddensmouth, cleaning away Goodge’s dirt, and setting the beautiful craft to rights. In the morning he was at Reginald’s bedroom, and his valet told him that his master had not been well in the night, but was better.

Reginald, however, was bent on seeing how George could sail the yacht, and, having had his breakfast, went in a pony-carriage to the harbour, where he took up a place on the cliff with Mary and Emily, in a comfortable corner facing the south-west, from which quarter the wind was blowing. They had not been there a quarter of an hour before they saw George at work. Two boats towed him just beyond the rocks, and then up went his canvas like lightning, and he began beating to windward, playing with the pretty vessel as if she was a new toy. Reginald seemed to watch with great interest for a long time, and then he said, “Mary!”

She was beside him at once.

“Don’t ever say a single unkind word to Anders. He was very foolish about that closed room, but he was not so much to blame. And always think of me at my best. Don’t think of me as a clever man; I have been that, but then I was at my worst; think of me as I am now—one who never willingly injured anybody, a mere child. Good-bye.”

She hurriedly put her hand upon his heart, but it had ceased to beat for ever. The flower which Emily had put into his hand had

fallen from it on the grass, and the patient soul of Reginald Hetherage, with all its weakness and errors, was face to face with its God at last.

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They made a pleasant grave for him in the shadow of the church on the north side, where the snow laid long in winter and where the summer shadows were coolest and most profound—the quietest spot in the whole churchyard. For some years the passing villagers would often see a bent lady and gentleman, both very old, who sat silently together by the simple headstone. After a time there were two graves, and the bent old General slept in one of them, while the old lady used to be brought there by children, and left for a time alone. At last there were three graves side by side, all tangled together in summer with flowers planted by loving hands, and in winter swept by the same winds and beaten by the same rains. Reginald lay in the centre between his two friends; and the children—George and Emily’s children—got to believe from a dream of the youngest of them, some years after his death, that he would rise first from the dead on the resurrection morning, and then would awaken General Anders and Aunt Hester, and that the three would come and tell them that Christ was coming; a foolish dream which had got into the little maid’s head from hearing the three old people so continually talked of by those who were left. The child was so full of her fancy for a time, that she would climb from her bed in the early summer morning and look towards the churchyard without fear, to see if the good and gentle Reginald had awakened, and was bringing the others to tell them the great news. For they all spoke of him as one who had lived without blame and fallen asleep without death. So the child had no terrors about such a passing away as his. In the summer she would go quietly by herself, and whisper through the grass into his ear, to know if Christ would come to-morrow; and when she died in autumn, they laid her by Reginald’s head at her desire, so that she might take the hand of the good man, whom she had never seen but had learned to love from hearsay, and pass into the Eternal Presence with him.

So he sleeps—happy at last.

“Thou wilt not turn upon thy bed.
 Chaunteth not the brooding bee
 Sweeter tones than calumny:
 Let them rave.
 Thou wilt never raise thine head
 From the green that folds thy grave:
 Let them rave.”

LEIGHTON COURT.

LEIGHTON COURT.

CHAPTER I.

THE River Wysclith, though one of the shortest in course of the beautiful rivers of Dartmoor, still claims a high place among them. None sooner quits the barren granite, and begins to wander seaward through the lower and richer country which lies between the Moor and the sea. None except Dart sends a larger body of water to the sea, and none forms a smaller or less dangerous estuary.

Indeed, its course is so exceedingly short, that the members of the Wysclith Vale Hunt, whose kennels were within a mile of the sea, were well acquainted, from frequent observation, with the vast melancholy bog in which it took its rise. More than once, more than twenty times, within the memory of old Tom Squire, the lean, little old huntsman, had the fox been run into in the midst of that great waste of turbary, from whence the infant stream issues; on ground which no man, leave alone a horse, dared to face. Laura Seckerton has a clever sketch in her portfolio, of the wild, desolate, elevated swamp as it appeared on one of these occasions. A sweep of yellow grass, interspersed with ling, and black bog pits: in the centre, far away from human help, a confused heap of struggling hounds killing their fox: round the edges, as near as they dared go, red-coated horsemen, most cleverly grouped in twos and threes; beyond all, a low ugly tor of weather-worn granite. Laura Seckerton could paint as well as she could ride, which is giving her very high praise indeed.

On a hot summer's day, if you had crossed the watershed from the northward, from the headwaters of the Ouse for instance; and if you found yourself in this desolate lonely swamp, with no signs of animal life except the cry of the melancholy peewit, or the quaint dull note of the stonechat; you would find it hard to believe that anything so wild, fierce, and loud as the river Wysclith, could be born of such solitary silence. But if you hold on

your way, round the bases of the low granite tors, between the tumbled rocks and the quaking bog, for four or five miles, you will begin, afar off, to hear a tinkling of waters, you will meet a broad amber-coloured stream, and find that the many trickling rills from the great swamp have united, and are quietly preparing for their journey to the sea; are making for that gap in the granite, below which the land drops away into an unknown depth, and from which you can see a vista of a gleaming glen miles below, in which the river, so quiet and so small up here, spouts and raves and roars like a giant as he is. Right and left, far, far below you, are crags, tors, castles of granite. Twenty streams from fifty glens, from a hundred sunny lonely hills, join our river far below; until tired of fretting and fuming among the granite crags in the glen of ten thousand voices, he finds his way out into the champaign country, and you see him wandering on in wide waving curves towards his estuary. All this you can see even on a blighty easterly day; with a clear south wind, Laura Seckerton used to say, that standing within two miles of the river's source, you can make out the fisher boats on the sands at its mouth, and the setting sun blazing on the windows of Leighton Court, which stands on a knoll of new red sandstone at the head of the tideway. I cannot say that either there or elsewhere I have ever distinguished drawing-room windows at a distance of eighteen miles as the crow flies: but I confess to have seen the vast tower and dark long façade of Berry Morecombe, which lies on the other side of the river, blocking the westerly sun and casting a long shadow over the sands towards Leighton Court, when I have stood on a summer's evening at the tip of the lonely marsh in which the Wysclith takes his rise, fifteen hundred feet above the sea. Standing just where he begins to live, and whimper like a new-born babe, over his granite rocks.

CHAPTER II.

THERE were only three families in this part of the country: the Downes, the Seckertons, and the Poyntzs. We shall meet them all directly; but it is necessary even here to say that the Downes (represented by Sir Peckwich Downes) were eminently respectable and horribly rich. That the Seckertons (Sir Charles Seckerton) were eminently respectable, very rich, though not so rich as the Downes; but that they had entirely taken the wind out of their,

Downes', sails, by Sir Charles marrying Lady Emily Lee, a sister of the Earl of Southmolton, and by taking the hounds nearly at the same time. And lastly, coming to the Poyntzs (represented by Sir Harry Poyntz, younger by a generation than either of the other baronets), we are obliged to say that the family had grown so utterly disreputable, that a respectable Poyntz was considerably rarer than a white crow. The third family, these Poyntzs, were what the Americans call "burst up," and their seat, Berry Morecombe Castle, was now let on a lease to Mr. Huxtable, a Manchester cotton-spinner.

Sir William Poyntz, that very disreputable old gentleman, had been the last master of the hounds, and had handsomely finished his ruin by taking them. He was a sad old fellow, and kept a sad establishment there in the castle. The only signs of decency which the old fellow showed, was that he would not allow any of his sons, legitimate or other, to come near the place. Harry Poyntz, now the baronet, used to come and stay at Leighton Court; Robert, the younger, was only dimly remembered by a few of the older servants, as a petulant, wayward, handsome child. There was a third one yet, whom some remembered, a very beautiful, winning boy; but he had no name, he was not acknowledged.

When Sir Charles Seckerton took the hounds, Mr. Huxtable took the castle, and very shortly after the wife of the latter died, leaving him with a little girl, heir to all his wealth. Sir William Poyntz left Sir Charles Seckerton a legacy also; he left him old Tom Squire, the huntsman. He was a silent, terrier-faced little fellow, who seemed to know more than he chose to tell, as indeed he did. He was a jewel, however; he had hunted that difficult country for many years, and if you had not taken him with the hounds, you might as well have left the hounds alone.

A very difficult hunting country? Why, yes. Irish horses strongly in request, not to mention Irish whips and second horsemen. A stone-wall country in part, and in part intersected by deep lanes and high hedges. Not a safe or promising country by any means. Bad accidents were not unknown; one very severe one had but recently happened, just before my tale begins. The first whip, a young Irishman, O'Ryan by name, had ridden into one of those deep red lanes, which intersect the new red sandstone hereabouts, and had so injured his spine as to be a cripple probably for life. Sir Charles had pensioned him with a pound a week; and being determined to try an Englishman this time, wrote to a friend in Leicestershire for a first-rate man, fit to succeed old Tom Squire, the wiry terrier-faced ex-Poyntz retainer aforesaid, as huntsman, when he should retire to the chimney-

corner, and twitter on the legends of the Poyntz family till he twittered no longer.

An answer had come by return of post. There had never been such a chance as now, wrote Sir George Herage. A young man, possessed of all the cardinal virtues, with several to spare; who was the most consummate rider ever seen, could tell the pedigree of a hound with one moment's glance, of gentle temper with man, horse, and dog. A young man who had hunted not only in Leicestershire and Berwickshire, but at Pau; a young man entirely up to every conceivable sort of country. Such a young man was To Let. And Sir George Herage's advice was, "Snap him up on any price; the more especially as he had expressed to me strongly his intense anxiety to improve his already great experience by hunting in that very county of yours; indeed, has given me warning the instant he heard of your want." On further examination of Sir George's letter, it appeared that this young Crichton, Bayard, Philip Sidney, St. Huberts' price was extremely moderate, considering his amazing virtues and talents. His very name, too, sounded well, Hammersley. Sir George was also anxious to impress on his friend's mind the fact that he was no ordinary person; that he was a deuced presentable fellow, and a fellow who would not stand much talking to, but was perfect at his work. Sir Charles thought himself in luck, and passed the letter over the breakfast table to Lady Emily, his wife, to see what *she* thought of it: by no means an unimportant matter.

Lady Emily was making a somewhat witchlike mess in a china basin, the basis of which was chocolate. Sir Charles had seen her put in sugar, brown bread, baked yam, and cream, and began to wonder when she would begin to eat it. She delayed her pleasure, however, and he grew impatient.

"Emily," said Sir Charles at last, "I wish, when you have gone through your morning ceremonies with your olla podrida, that you would look at that letter."

"My love," she said, "I will do so directly." And she went on with her preparations quite regardless of the impatient exasperated way in which Sir Charles tore the *Times* open, pitched the supplement on the ground, and rattled the other part open.

At last she had done. She read the letter steadily, put it down again, and gazed into space.

"Well," said Sir Charles, testily, "will that man do or no?"

"I do wonder," she said, with her great, cool, high-bred voice; "now I really do wonder."

"I wonder at our luck in getting such a man at such a time," said Sir Charles.

“I don't mean that,” said Lady Emily. “I wonder what on earth this paragon of a creature has been doing which makes Sir George Herage so exceeding anxious to foist him off upon us, and get him three hundred miles out of his own way. That is what I am wondering at.”

“You look on it in that light, do you, Emily?” said Sir Charles.

“I wonder,” said Lady Emily, going on in her own line, “whether the fellow is good-looking, and has been making love to one of those red-haired, horse-breaking Herage girls. That is it, depend on it. Not another word, Charles—here comes Laura.”

“My dear Mother, good morning.”

“You think he ought to come, then, Emily?” said Sir Charles. “You think he will do?”

“My dear Charles! Do! Such a paragon of a creature! The question is not whether he will do, but what he has been doing. I have the deepest curiosity to see the man. I suppose he will take his meals with us; what rooms shall I get ready for him?”

“Then he had better come?”

“It is not in my line at all to say yes or no. If my personal wishes were consulted, I should say let him come. You seem to have collected all the available rogues and fools in the South of Devon about your stable and kennel, and I am getting tired of them. I want to see a rogue from another county for a change. Have the man down.”

“My dearest Emily, why are you so disagreeable this morning?”

“I did not mean to be so to you, Charles,” said his wife, kissing him as she passed him. “Since you have taken me out of society, I have no one to whet my tongue on but you, you selfish man. And it is rather cool of Sir George Herage to try and foist off a man, who evidently has made the country too hot to hold him, on to us.”

“But, Emily dear, I won't have him if you think so.”

“Have him down, Charles, by all means have him down.”

And so the paragon Hammersley came. And no one having said anything against it, it must be supposed that every one was perfectly satisfied. But Lady Emily determined to find out the reason of this wonderful recommendation of Sir George Herage, or perish in the attempt. She neither did the one thing nor the other at first; but she was not easily to be beaten.

Her sister, Lady Melton, on being appealed to by letter, at first

could find out nothing more about the young man than that Sir George Herage had picked him up at Pau, where he was hunting the hounds during the illness of the huntsman, and had brought him home ; that he certainly understood his business in a masterly way, but was uncivil, loutish, quarrelsome, and rode very little under twelve stone. Lady Melton added that she had never seen the young man, that he had never appeared with the Quorn ; and that was all she knew about him.

CHAPTER III.

I HAVE described the lay of the country as you look from the mountain down to the sea, and will describe for you directly the appearance of that country, looking up from the tideway towards the mountain, from the terraces of Leighton Court. But my eye rests on something in the immediate foreground which arrests it.

I find I cannot describe the dark, purple moor, with Wysclith leaping from rock to rock down its side, without first getting rid of two figures in the foreground. From the terraces of Leighton Court, which surround the house east, seaward, and westward, one looks over the sandbars of the river, here beginning to spread into its little estuary, on to the red county, beyond on to the flashing cascades of the river ; above all on to the dark, black-blue moor. But there are two figures in the foreground, which seem to impersonate the scenery, and being animate, they must be looked to first.

Lady Emily stands nearest to us. A large, handsome, gipsy-looking woman, whose real age was five-and-forty, but whose constant good humour, and the fact of her having had her own way both in the county and in her family, for some twenty years, caused to look ten years younger. She was a noble, kindly, nay jolly-looking woman, so very like the nearer parts of the landscape ; so rich in colour, so bold in rounded outlines.

If Lady Emily stood well as a central figure to the blazing reds and greens of the fertile red sandstone country, her daughter might well represent to our fancy, the dark purple moor which hung aloft in the distance, furrowed by deep rifts which in their darkest depths showed the gleams of the leaping torrent ; and yet which, through ten miles of atmosphere seemed little more than a perpendicular plane, without cape or bay, prominence or depth.

She was a little taller than her mother, her face though like her mother's, was more refined, with the refinement of youth; her face might get a trifle coarser by age (who knows?), or might be swept by storms of passion; but at present, she was as placid, as delicately tinted, as lofty, and apparently a thousand times more unapproachable, than the mountain on which she gazed.

People tell one that at the end of the last century there was a school or party among people of rank, whose *specialité* was the extreme care with which they educated their women—a party who hailed Mrs. Hannah More as their leader and example. Very few of us have so little experience of life, as not to have seen and respected one of the old ladies thus trained, and to reflect, one hopes, on the very great deal we owe to them and to their influence. None of us, however, have probably had the luck to see a more perfect specimen of this type of lady than was the old Countess of Southmolton, the bosom friend of Hannah More, grandmother of Laura Seckerton, whose gentle influence was still felt in her daughter's house. She had formed Lady Emily upon the most perfect model, and Lady Emily had fully answered her expectations, but partly from the natural vivacity of her disposition, and partly from her having married a sporting baronet, she had become a trifle corrupted; so that her manners, beside her more sedate mother, appeared almost brusque and jovial. She, however, had vast reverence for her mother, and for her mother's system. And so Laura had been brought up, not so much by her mother as by her grandmother, in the very straightest mode of Queen Charlottism.

And she had taken to the style of thing kindly enough. As a child she was too slow and dreamy, too "good," as her grandmother would have said, to make any flat rebellion, and as she grew up, her grandmother, as having more talent, attracted her perhaps more than her mother; besides the style of thing suited her. She was idle and dreamy, and she liked rules for life; and such wells of passion as were in her were as yet unruffled by any wind. So it was that her manner was far more staid, and her habits of thought far narrower than those of her mother.

A grand, imperial, graceful-looking girl, with a Greek face, bearing not much colour, and an imperial diadem of dark black hair, dark as the moor after a thunderstorm; was there a fault in her face? Only one; the mouth was rather large.

CHAPTER IV.

THESE two figures were so very prominent, as being perhaps the only two things visible in the landscape I have in my mind's eye, that I could see nothing, or make you see nothing, till they were disposed of. We will soon have done with the rest of the landscape, at which the reader will possibly rejoice.

Leighton Court was what is generally called Tudor, of a sort ; stone-built, mullions and transoms of granite. Length 105 ft., depth 50 ft. It was very like Balliol, uncommonly like Oriel, and a perfect replica of University. It stood near the extreme end of a promontory of the red country, some 400 acres in extent, and say 100 ft. in extreme height, densely wooded, down to the very shore : which divided the little estuary of the Wyselith from the larger estuary of the Avon.

An old Tudor house, say, standing on a promontory of red rock, feathered with deep green woods, whose base lost itself in an ocean of wide-spreading sea sand. As you looked towards the sea from the hill landward of the house, you saw narrow sandy Wyselith on your right, broad sandy Avon on your left ; the house deep bosomed in feathering woods, which ran down and fringed the sands, in front, and beyond sands and sands bounded by the blue Channel with toiling ships.

Wyselith, on your right, made but a small estuary, hardly could carry the tide a mile above the house, for he had to make the sea between the rib of sandstone on which Leighton Court stood, and another higher rib, three hundred yards to the westward, on the summit of which stood the great Norman keep of Morecombe Castle, which, at the equinoxes, threw its long shadows across the narrow tideway, and in March and September, at sunset, lay the shade of its tallest battlements on the smooth shorn turf of Leighton Court pleasance. At those two periods of the year when the sun was due west, and began to darken towards his setting, the tower of the keep of Morecombe seemed to hang minatory and darkly over its more peaceful neighbour the hall ; but at all other times the castle was a thing of beauty for the inhabitants of the Court. At morn it rose a column of grey, tinged with faint orange ; at noon pure pearl grey with purplish shadows ; in the evening dark leaden colour, with the blaze of the sunset behind it, and its shadow barring the narrow river, and creeping towards the feet of those who sat on the terrace of the Court.

The river just began to narrow in opposite Leighton Court and

Morecombe Castle, and not a quarter of a mile up, left creeping among sand-bars and took to chafing among vast shingle beds. There is no town on the river, only the big red village of South Wyston round a turn in the river. So you looked up a reach in the river, feathered with wood and ribbed with reddish purple rocks, up to the cornfields, wooded hedgerows and woodlands of the red country, and above and beyond at the blue brown moor, with young Wyselith raving down in a hundred cascades through a rift in the granite.

CHAPTER V.

PROFOUND as was Sir Charles' respect for his wife, and his reverence for his mother-in-law, there was one point in Laura's education on which, once for all, he had so coolly and calmly opposed them, that they, like sensible women, knew he was in earnest, and gave up the contest there and then.

Laura was to learn to ride; nay, oh Shade of Hannah More! to hunt. He was so very distinct about this, the first point on which he had ever opposed them, that they—knowing that although he was so easy going to them, yet had among men the character of being a resolute, valiant man—gave way at once, and did not even openly protest.

Laura was strong and healthy, and got very fond indeed of the sport. One need hardly say that under Sir Charles' tuition she turned out a first-rate horsewoman. The country was a difficult, nay dangerous country, but then, with its continually recurring copses, it was a very slow country, by no means a bad country for a lady who knew every gap, low stile, and gate, for ten miles round; a better country, for a lady, perhaps, than faster countries nearer London, certainly easier than Leicestershire.

So she got very fond of the sport, and if the pace got too great for her, there was nothing to prevent her riding home alone. Mr. Sponge, not to mention Mr. Jorrocks, don't make hunting tours in the West. There were no strangers for her to meet, except perhaps an officer or so from Plymouth. And very few officers were at Plymouth many weeks without making her father's acquaintance, so that of real strangers there were none. She very much enjoyed the times when she got thrown out among the stone-walls, and had to ride home alone through the deep lanes, dreaming.

Dreaming ! What could she do but dream ? When she sat on her horse alone, on the hill which lay half-way between the sea and the moor, she looked round on the widest horizon she had ever seen. She had heard of a great world which roared and whirled beyond that horizon : but she had never seen it, or seen a glimpse of it with her own eyes. She heard her grandmother and her mother talking of this world ; she had been expressly trained, carefully trained, for moving in this world. She could have gone, with her training and her nerve, into the best drawing-room in London, or more, in Paris, and have found herself perfectly at home. Lady Southmolton confessed that she was perfectly formed ; but meanwhile they could not go to London this year, and then they couldn't go next year. Sir Charles was hard to move, and the hounds had cost a deal of money—a great deal too much money, indeed.

So she heard of the world only from without. She heard her grandmother and her mother talking of the great governors of the country, and the great givers of parties, which were reported in the *Times*, most familiarly ; heard a great Liberal nobleman talked of as “ dear Henry,” and came to the conclusion that if dear Henry had taken her grandmother's advice, things would not have come to the present dead-lock. She heard these two women continually living in the past among the great men they had danced with, growing more familiar in the mention of their names as time went on, expanding and developing their legends and recollections about these people, and egging one another on until a doubtful recollection became an article of faith, and a third-hand story became a personal experience. She heard all this, and possibly laughed at it. But she knew well that her mother had known the War God, and sometimes she thought it rather tiresome that she could not know him also.

She heard of the world, too, a very different world from the soldiers and sailors who came over to them from Plymouth. Her mother startled her one night by telling her, that of all the sailors and soldiers she had ever entertained for the space of twenty years, Captain Fitzgorman was the only one who had ever thoroughly known the great world. She was startled, for she had set him down as the dullest and most unmitigated noodle she had ever had inflicted on her ; a man who could talk about lords and ladies, their marryings and intermarryings, and nothing else. She had asked her mother not to ask him again.

“ My dear, he knows the world ! ”

“ He knows the peerage,” said Laura peevishly ; “ and I don't want to have the peerage talked to me. If I want to know any-

thing out of the peerage, I get it down and refer to it. He seems to have got it up. I listened to him, and you, and grandma to-night, until I was sick. The whole conversation amounted to a competitive examination on those sort of people. And while we are on the subject, allow me to tell you, having listened through curiosity, that you got considerably the worst of it. That noodle was better up in that particular kind of talk than the pair of you put together."

Jovial Lady Emily had to stand on her dignity.

"Because I withdrew myself from the world when I married your dear father, I cannot see that it is becoming for my daughter to cast in my teeth my forgetfulness of the world."

Though her grammer was involved, as it always was when she tried to be grand, Laura did not laugh at it. She only said good-humouredly—

"Well, mother, I may be wrong, but it seems to me ridiculous for a younger son to talk about nothing but his own and other people's connections."

She had a sharper arrow in her quiver than that for young "Fitz;" but who could snarl or say a bitter thing in the presence of her genial mother, who kissed her, called her a radical, and went to bed.

Laura, you see, did not believe in the *grand monde*. She believed that the real great world was the wide world the sailors and soldiers told her of. West Coast of Africa, India, and all that sort of thing, which the reader may supplement, out of the history of these wonderful thirty millions of islanders who have seized on the strongest and richest parts of the world, according to his fancy. But this world was as much shut out to her as the London world, and she was thrown on to her own, a very small one, more the pity.

The peasantry were all her world. Poor visiting had always been one of the rules of the family, and Laura took to it not unkindly. She got to love the people, she understood their wants, she excused their faults, and got more deeply, than she was aware, imbued with their superstitions.

CHAPTER VI.

LORD HATTERLEIGH was a young man of great promise aged twenty-two, who wore goloshes, carrying a bulgy umbrella, and took dinner pills.

Generally he took them in the hall, getting a confidential glass of water from the butler. But if he had been somewhat late, and had forgot them, he would have no hesitation in taking them after his soup, or even after his fish, before an admiring dinner-table. Lord Hatterleigh's inside was the most wonderful inside ever known. It was a complicated and delicate piece of machinery, which required continual oiling. He was exceedingly proud of it. Two or three doctors had set it right for him, but he found himself somewhat lost if it was not out of order. A subject of conversation was lost to him. He could talk peerage by the yard; he could pipe out feeble wishy-washy politics by the hour; but to the dearest friends of his heart he always led the conversation to his inside.

It was a great joke in the county for some time, that Lord Hatterleigh had appointed Sam Bolton his chaplain, because Bolton had a complication in his liver or somewhere, nearly as fine as the hitch in Lord Hatterleigh's "ilia." It was notorious, and what is very different, perfectly true, that he was very fond of Samuel Bolton, and that they would sit up half the night comparing their symptoms. Sam Bolton was the most intimate friend he had, and it was as plain as the nose on one's face, that as soon as the present rector dropped, Lord Hatterleigh would give him the living of Hatterleigh to keep him near him. Sam Bolton got engaged on the strength of it. The Rector himself, a lean old gentleman, a bishop's man, who preached in his surplice, turned to the east at the creed, and in spite of it kept his church full, recognised him as his successor.

"When I am gone, my dear Mr. Bolton," he would say, "you will find that the dilapidation money will hardly make the house fit for a family man. You are going to marry, and you will have to build, sir, you will have to build."

The Rector "dropped" suddenly, through attending a typhus case on a fast day without a good dinner and a glass of port, but Sam Bolton never was Rector of Hatterleigh. Lord Hatterleigh wrote off to Dr. Arnold to send him the best available parson he could lay his hands on. Doctor Arnold did so, and the Rector of Hatterleigh was not Sam Bolton.

Sam Bolton sulked, and at last one evening grew pathetic, nay, got near to a state of injured indignation.

"I never promised you the living, Bolton," said his lordship, nursing his big knee. "I like you very much, but I don't think your are fit for it. Besides, your digestion, my dear fellow, your digestion!"

A high-minded man enough, this Lord Hatterleigh, always

putting before him, according to his light, a lofty ideal, and fighting up to it with the obstinacy of a mule and the cunning of a fox. The world called him false and untrustworthy, but if you catechised the world, you would find that he had never departed from his pledged word, and had never disappointed hopes which he himself had given.

He had tried Rugby, but his health wouldn't stand it (so said he and his grandmother). He had gone to a great private tutor's and had read continuously and diligently (as for reading *hard*, it was not in the man) and in due time had made his appearance in Peckwater. Here he was recognised at once as a young man of great promise. He could, give him a bottle of water, talk you washy politics by the yard, by the hour. But the union, most patient of assemblées, very soon got impatient of him, and certain square-headed, bright-eyed young rascals from Balliol and University began to make terrible mincemeat of him. Still he was a young nobleman of promise.

Of great promise out of little performance; he was so very steady and studious that outsiders put him down for all sorts of degrees, treble first, said some, for he had sent a gigantic order to Shrimpton for chemical and geological books, and was evidently going in to win. But after dandering about the University for three years, he got a bad fourth in the classics and merely passed in the other schools. After which, he transferred himself and his talents to his paternal acres and the House of Lords. On his own estates he did his duty manfully and well. In the House of Lords he spoke on the Address and none afterwards. He found he was out of his depth, and had the sense to float without trying to swim. Most likely his failure at Oxford had done him good. There he had been measured with a moiety of the talent of the country, and had failed. I think that in his way he understood this.

But with perfect good temper. If he was sly, it was only through a kind of half physical, half nervous cowardice. There was none of the cat-like bitterness of the real coward about him. He hated a scene beyond all things, but he would face a scene, and go through with it to the end if one of his principles was at stake, and *win*. Temper! his temper was angelic, so long as he had not lost his umbrella, mislaid his goloshes, or forgot his dinner pills; and then his temper only showed itself in a kind of plaintive peevishness. When any one of these three things happened, Laura could always bring him into good temper again. The rules of society prevented her talking over his complaints with him, but she could talk genealogies and marriages with so many mistakes

as to rouse him into animation to set her right, and she was fond of the poor creature. She was very tender to the village idiot, too, and had prevented the boys from bullying him into madness many times. Lord Hatterleigh had been her butt from childhood, and Laura had never cared to look for such finer qualities as there might be in him. They used to call him *Ursa Major*.

CHAPTER VII.

THE little affair of Assewal scarcely deserves to be called a battle, it was merely a prelude; nay, not even that, only a tuning of fiddles for the "Grand Devil's Opera," which crashed and roared so late into the next day that the last mutter of it was heard as the sinking sun flamed upon the Eastern ghaut; and night, and silence, only half-broken by the low wails and moans of the wounded, settled down upon another great field, whose name henceforth is one of the landmarks of history.

Yet a remarkable thing happened there. The advance-guard of the enemy, as well as one can understand, were in a strongish position, on the other side of a nullah, and were keeping up an infernal fire of artillery at a native regiment of ours, which was only half sheltered by a roll in the ground. It was absolutely necessary that this regiment should stay in its present position, for it was the extreme of our left flank in that little affair, and our general was engaged in turning their left flank, and forcing them into that disadvantageous position in which they gave us battle the next day, and got so terribly beaten.

Sir Charles had deputed the work to be done on his right to three or four men whose names have since been burnt deep into the memories of their countrymen, and therefore he knew that the work on the right was being as efficiently done as if he had been there himself.

It was necessary, however, for the Eagle's eye to watch this left flank, which was our weakest place. And so the Eagle was there with his great hooked beak stretched towards the enemy, from time to time shaking out his ruffled feathers ready to swoop and strike.

As he was. The 140th Dragoons were behind the tope in which he stood; and if the Sikh artillery did not soon feel the pressure which he was putting on their left, it would become

necessary to hurl our cavalry at this artillery, and silence it with the loss of half of one of our best regiments.

No one could doubt that. The plain—more correctly the glacis—which lay between the Sikh artillery and the half-concealed native regiment in the lower ground, was being ripped and torn and riven by their furious cannonade. Life, even for a single individual, seemed to be impossible there. What would be the fate of seven hundred close-packed horsemen—Thermopylæ or Balaclava?

Some of the shot were reaching the native regiment, and they were getting fidgety. If they could be kept there until the pressure on the enemy's left was felt? If the sacrifice of the 140th could be saved? But a good many shot had come ripping in on the flank companies, which were exposed on each side of the roll in the ground, and they were getting unsteady.

“Go and tell him to draw his flank companies behind the ridge,” he said, and turning found himself face to face with a cornet of the 140th, a handsome pensive-looking boy, who by some accident had been sent up to him with a message.

The boy, a scarlet-and-gold thing, all over golden fripperies and tags and bobtails, topped with a white pith helmet, a very beautiful and expensive article (receiving one-third the pay of a Staffordshire iron-puddler), went jingling down the hill and passed behind the native regiment till he came to the Colonel. They saw him deliver his message, and thought he was coming back again.

So he was, but by a very queer route. He rode past the left flank of the wavering regiment, and then, mounting the hill, turned, and came coolly jingling back at a sling trot over that terrible plain slope, which was being ripped and torn and sent into the air in all directions by the enemy's shot, and on which human life appeared impossible. Fountains and showers of stones and sand were rising and falling all around him as he rode, but he came coolly clanking on, and while the staff were expecting to see him cut in two every instant, he managed to knock his helmet off.

He stopped, dismounted, picked it up, put it on hindside before, altered it, and prepared to mount. His horse was restive, and he gave it a good-natured little kick in the ribs, got on again, and came jangling slowly up to the tope where the Eagle was posted. The Eagle never liked that sort of thing. He was very angry; he shook his feathers and opened on him.

“Are you a Frenchman, sir, that you play these Tom-fool's games under fire? Do you know, sir, that your life is your

country's, sir, and that death is a very solemn thing? Do you know, that if it were not for an extraordinary instance of God's mercy, you would be lying howling and dying in the grass yonder? What did you do it for: eh, sir?"

The boy looked at him with his great melancholy eyes, and said—

"The 84th seemed getting unsteady, sir; and I thought I would show them that it was not so bad as it looked."

"Hem! that is another matter. That is a different affair altogether. You have acted with great valour and discretion; you have done a noble deed at the right time. Such actions as yours, sir, elevate the tone of the army, and deserve to live in the mouths of men for ever. What is your name?"

"George Hilton."

"He is Jack's boy," said a general who stood near.

"Why couldn't you have said so before?" snapped out the Eagle.

"Because I didn't want to spoil the fun of hearing you make a set complimentary speech to Jack's boy. Fancy such a torrent of fervid eloquence being poured out on *his* head. It's as good as a play."

The great warrior was very much amused, and held out his hand to the lad.

"You are at your father's tricks, are you, you monkey? Go back to your regiment. I shall write to your mother."

And so he did, and kept his eye on the boy. Young George Hilton soon changed into an infantry regiment, partly because his mother had lost some money, and partly because his patron and his father's friend wished it. In time his patron died; but he fought his way steadily on through the weary nights of 1854, through the dark and terrible hour of 1855, leaving his mark on everything he undertook, and getting his name well known, not only at the Horse Guards, but to the most careless of the general public. Here we find him now on the terrace beside Laura. Colonel Hilton, C.B., V.C. a tall man of remarkable personal beauty, with a dark-brown beard, and large melancholy eyes; and with a low-pitched, but singularly distinct voice. A dangerous man for any girl to listen to, among the lengthening summer twilight shadows, particularly after having had Lord Hatterleigh gobbling and spluttering out insane political twaddle the whole evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

“AND how do you like Cain, my love?” said Lady Emily, sweeping in full dressed into Sir Charles’s dressing-room, just as he was tying his cravat for dinner.

“Cain, my dear?”

“The new young man.”

“Why do you call him Cain?”

“Because he must have murdered his brother, or something as bad, to get such a recommendation. Don’t you see, you foolish old man, that if what Sir George Herage says about him is in any way true, he would sooner have pulled out his few remaining teeth than part with him? I hope we sha’n’t have our throats cut.”

“I thought you called yourself a Christian,” growled Sir Charles.

“I was under the same impression myself,” laughed Lady Emily.

“Then why do you go on comparing an innocent young man to Judas Iscariot?”

“I did not compare him to Judas Iscariot. I compared him to Cain.”

“If Cain was such a splendid-looking fellow as he is, he was a remarkable man.”

“Oh! is he so very grand? Does he talk well?”

“He talks very little, and seems a little surly.”

“Can he ride?”

“Don’t ask me. I have nearly broken my neck looking after him. Absolutely superb!”

“Tell me some more about him.”

“What makes you so eager?”

“Never you mind; are his manners good?”

“Yes, I should say so. He is perfectly Tom Squire’s master, by-the-bye. The fellow’s London assurance has completely quelled the old man; he takes orders from his subordinate which he could never take from me.”

“Now,” said Lady Emily, “comes *my* turn. Suppose I was to tell you that I had found out all about him and refused to tell you.”

“You know you couldn’t keep it to yourself. I should hear all about it if I waited. Better tell it at once.”

“I suppose I had. By-the-bye, this young gentleman’s name will be George.”

“It is so. How did you guess?”

"My love, I know all about everything. My sister has found it all out. You know that Sir William Poyntz had two sons, Harry and Bob?"

"Of course."

"Did you ever hear of a third, an illegitimate one?"

"I know there was such a son. The old man's favourite. Well?"

"This is the man."

"No! Is it really? That is very strange."

"Sir Harry Poyntz has been in the neighbourhood and has told my sister everything. This George has been a sadly dissipated fellow."

"That is one of Harry's lies. The fellow's eye is as clear as mine," intercalated Sir Charles.

"Well, that is Sir Harry's account of the matter—very dissipated. He, it seemed, got hold of Robert Poyntz, now in India, and led him into all kinds of dissipation. All this brought on a serious misunderstanding between Sir Harry and his brother, and led to this George Hammersley being utterly ignored by Sir Harry, and sent to live on his wits. And that is your Adonis."

"The best thing about our Adonis seems to be his good looks and good manners, and the fact that Harry Poyntz has taken away his character."

"The last item is the most important," said Lady Emily. "I never knew Harry Poyntz tell the truth yet; did you?"

"Not I. But Poyntz is coming here soon; in six months, I believe. He refuses to renew Huxtable's lease. What will Adonis do then?"

"That is distinctly his business," said Lady Emily. "We shall see."

"I wonder why he left Leicestershire, this paragon," said Sir Charles, just as they got to the drawing-room door.

"He admired, or was admired too much by one of the Herage girls. Don't say a word about that, it is not fair. Laura will take uncommon good care that he don't make love to her."

CHAPTER IX.

"AND who is going to make love to our Laura?" said a little voice, very like a tiny chime of silver bells, from the other end of the room, as they entered.

There sat, all alone, a little old lady with a white lace cap

on her head, and a white lace shawl over her shoulders. She wore her own grey hair, and her complexion was nearly as delicate now as in her youth, but slightly paler, and covered with tiny wrinkles, only visible when one was quite close to her. A most wonderfully beautiful old lady (how beautiful old women can be), with a cheerful peaceful light in her face, which made one love her at once: and yet with a look of complacent, self-possessed, self-conscious goodness, too, which, after a time became provoking, and which tempted outsiders and sinners to contradict her, and to broach heretical opinions for the mere sake of aggravation.

"And who is going to make love to our Laura?" she repeated.

Lady Emily would have done a great deal sooner than have repeated before her mother the audacious joke she had just made with her husband; the old lady would have been too painfully shocked at it; she turned it off by a little fib.

"Oh, you can guess whom I mean, mamma. I hate mentioning names."

"Poor Ursa Major is terribly smitten, I fancy," said the old lady, smiling. "I am fond of Ursa Major. He comes of a good stock. All the Hortons are good. He will make the woman he marries very happy if she will only let him."

"Yes, he is a good match for any woman," said Lady Emily, seizing her opportunity with admirable quickness, and speaking in a free off-hand way, as though it was a mere abstract question. "He has sixty thousand a year. He is very amiable and talented, and young. That is a great point. He is not beyond forming, and Laura would form him."

"Laura!" shouted Sir Charles.

"My love we are not deaf," said Lady Emily, with lofty quietness.

These two good ladies never *told* Sir Charles anything important, they always *broke* it to him, administered it in gentle doses, as beef tea is given to starving persons; sometimes driving him half wild in the process. This seemed a fair occasion, though an accidental one, of "breaking" to Sir Charles the fact that Lord Hatterleigh was most undoubtedly smitten with Laura. They were considerably anxious, and had reason to be. But they did not show it.

"I beg pardon," said Sir Charles, "but you gave me such a start."

"I merely said," remarked Lady Emily, shutting her eyes, pulling the string, and letting off the cannon, bang!—"that in case Laura married him, the excellent training she has received from her grandmother would——"

“Laura marry *him*, that Guy Fawkes booby! What monstrous rubbish is this——”

“Would polish him, remove any little uncouthness, and so on,” continued Lady Emily, with steady severity.

“She’s a clever girl,” said Sir Charles, “but she will never make him anything but what he is, an awkward lopsided gaby, the butt of every club he belongs to. Besides, the man is not a marrying man. There is something wrong with him. He keeps a doctor; and he has not had a proper education; he can’t ride or shoot. He couldn’t ride about with her. It would never do—shall never be. How could you dare to think of such a monstrous arrangement, Emily? But Laura can take care of herself, that is one comfort. There he comes himself, by all that’s awkward!”

Somebody was heard lumbering downstairs and objurgating somebody else, in a voice compounded of a gobble and a growl. Some one slipped down the last two stairs. That it was the owner of the gorilla voice was evident from that voice exclaiming aloud, “Bless my soul, I have broke my back!”

“Sweet youth,” said Sir Charles, “I hope he won’t cry.”

Before Lord Hatterleigh had finished a plaintive wrangle with his valet, as to whether his slipping downstairs was his own or the valet’s fault, two other people entered the drawing-room together—Laura and Colonel Hilton; a most splendid pair of people, indeed; they had evidently been saying something kindly wicked about Lord Hatterleigh’s accident, and were both smiling. He was slightly behind her, and being the tallest was bending towards her; she, saying the last word of their little joke, was turning her beautiful head back to him, and showing the soft curves of her splendid throat as though Millais were lying in wait for her. They were a wonderfully beautiful pair of people, and the three folk in the drawing-room were obliged to confess it.

Said Lady Southmolton to herself: “That would do, perhaps, under other circumstances. But he hasn’t got any fortune, and she don’t care for him, and never will. He flatters her too grossly and too openly, and she hates being flattered; with all his personal beauty and his gallantry, she despises him. I could tell him how to win that girl, but I won’t. He has neither birth nor money. That young man don’t understand women of her stamp; very few soldiers do.”

Said Lady Emily: “I wish that could come about; he is so handsome and so good. But it can’t. He has got no money, and what I can’t understand is, that she don’t like him. I wish

he had Hatterleigh's money, and that she would fall in love with him." Two things which happened to be impossible.

Said Sir Charles : " Sometimes I wish the hounds were at the devil. If it was not for them I should be beforehand with the world, instead of getting behindhand year after year. I wish this fellow had Hatterleigh's money. But he hasn't. She is evidently in love with this fellow. (Was she, Sir Charles? The mother and grandmother did not think so, and ladies are generally considered judges of that sort of thing.) I suppose it will end in her marrying that booby, the women seem set on it."

That was the way with Sir Charles and with a great many others; a furious rebellion against the women, and then a dull sulky acquiescence. Stronger men than Sir Charles have been fairly beaten by female persistency. He gave up the battle, however, the moment he saw that the enemy were going to show fight. He hated the very sound of Lord Hatterleigh's voice. He had thought, half an hour ago, that the sacrifice of such a being as Laura to such a booby as Lord Hatterleigh, was a monstrous thing; but—but Lord Hatterleigh was rich; and if Laura, noble, honest Laura, could say she loved him, what had he to say; it would be a great match, and so on, only there lurked in his heart a strong half-formed desire, that Laura would box his lordship's ears, the first moment he ventured to speak to her.

"Aha, my young lady," he said to himself, "I have no doubt you *would* give the hair off your head to have him talk to you in the tone he does to Laura. But you run after him too openly, my poor Maria."

This remark arose from the entrance of the Huxtables, father and daughter. Mr. Huxtable was a fine-looking North-countryman, and his daughter Maria a very fine specimen of a Lancashire lass, by no means unlike Laura, but coarser. Sir Charles, who was standing close to her, had noticed the shade of vexation which passed over her handsome face, when she saw Colonel Hilton bending over Laura, and made the above remark, which he supplemented by another.

"What fools soldiers are! There is Hilton dangling about after Laura, who don't care for him, and sixty thousand pounds ready to drop into his mouth."

The great mighty master of Tomfoolery, Levassor, blundering on to the stage with his breeches up to his ears, just as Rachel had drooped into one of her sublimest attitudes, could hardly have been a greater foil to her than was Lord Hatterleigh to Colonel Hilton; yet Laura left the Colonel directly, and going to the other, began kindly to laugh at him about his tumbling downstairs.

He was extremely flattered and pleased by her kindness, and held himself as gallantly as he could. He had made his valet take particular pains with his toilette, but as the valet had said to himself, it wasn't the fault of the clothes, but of the man inside them. He remained silent, only smiling radiantly until it became time to take Lady Emily in to dinner.

He sat next Laura, but his silence continued until he had finished his soup and his fish. He did nothing but smile. He had invented something pretty in the retirement of his chamber which he was to say to Laura, but he had forgotten it, and his soul was consumed in spasmodic efforts to remember it. Laura saw this to her intense amusement. At the end of the fish she thought he had got it, for he brightened up and gave a sigh of relief. She was wrong, he had only abandoned the effort. He slopped out a glass of water, looked sweetly at her, and said—

“I take it that the great duration of the Liverpool ministry arose mainly from the absence of anything like decision or force of character in the chief. The whole, too, was a mere coalition as profligate as that between Fox and North. The very possibility of a coalition argues an entire absence of principle in the coalescing parties, and of policy in the coalition itself.”

CHAPTER X.

HUNTING was nearly the only irregular pursuit which Laura had, the only one the duration of which could not be calculated. With this single exception her life was as perfectly methodical as her grandmother's. The system on which she had been brought up consisted mainly of perfect regularity of time and uniformity of thought. This hunting was an eccentric incalculable comet in the regular planetary system of her mother. It was the only exception; the rest of her life was perfectly regular, nearly as regular as a religious sister's.

A morning walk from six to seven. Religious reading in her own room till half-past. Breakfast at nine. Poor people from ten to twelve. Solid reading (but very few novels admitted into the house) till one. Lunch. Drive out with grandma in the afternoon. Dinner at seven. Prayers and bed at half-past ten.

So much for a non-hunting day; one of the days after her

grandmother's own heart. Idleness, said her grandma, was the source of all temptation; days spent like this could lead to no temptation (except that of suicide, perhaps?), and therefore would help to preserve from sin. But a hunting day was a very different sort of thing. What must the poor old lady have suffered on one of them, with her well-regulated mind lacerated at every point! She had learnt to suffer and smile in far more terrible affairs than this.

On those happy hunting days all the old rules were broken through. Waking from some happy dream to the consciousness of an existence still happier, Laura would find herself in her riding habit, hat in hand, in the dim grey morning passing through the great hall to the breakfast-room to meet her father. And oh, what divine feasts were those *tête-à-tête* breakfasts with him, and him alone, before the roaring logs. All her nature seemed changed on these occasions. She felt as some old knight must have felt, when, after being mew'd up in his castle for a weary week he found himself on the road. She had a day of adventure, of unknown adventure, before her. On other days she was watching the clock to see when it was time to leave off working and begin reading. On these there was no rule, no law. Liberty—wild, mad liberty!

Then came the ride with her father in the cold wild morning up one of the more secluded lowland valleys through ever rising lanes, which grew more steep until the cottages grew scarcer, and the hedges less cared for, until there were no lanes and no hedges, but tracks among scattered oak and holly, and the trickling trout-stream in the bottom gleaming among his alders. And at last, after the stream had divided into three or four little channels, came opener country, and rising above the highest combe, the gentle roll called Whinny Hill, a hundred acres of gorse, now made brilliant by the redecoats which awaited their arrival. Then the summit with a hundred pleasant greetings, the moor in the distance, dark purple wreathed with silver mist.

And the coming home at night, draggled and happily tired, and, last of all, the sweet confused dreams of all the day's wild adventures. What though to-morrow should be a dull routine—there were other hunting days to come!

So she had two lives, as it would seem—the one of respectable not unpleasant routine, the other of glorious abandon. "In case of overwhelming trouble," she often asked herself, "to which of these lives should I fly for comfort, for consolation?" Surely a nature so noble as hers was capable of fighting sorrow with the weapons of quiet, order, and industry with which her grandmother

had so perfectly armed her, and of winning a glorious peace, such as her grandmother had won? So she said to herself, until she looked in the glass, and then she found it difficult to believe. Could that imperial diadem of hair ever come to be smoothed down under a white-laced cap? Could those steady-set hawk-like eyes ever get into them the tender hare-like look of Lady Southmolton: and, more than all, could that somewhat large stern mouth ever learn to set itself into the peaceful eternal smile which sat like some gleam of heaven on the beautiful old woman's lips? Mrs. Hannah More was a wise woman, but Laura used to doubt her power of having done that even were she alive. "They will never make a saint of me," she used to say to herself. "I'll be a good woman, but I shall never be a saint. Papa has spoilt me. If anything does happen, I will stay by him. He and his ways suit me best, I fear. I shall always have my horse, and be able to ride myself tired among these long-drawn valleys. I wish I was better, but he has spoilt me!"

CHAPTER XI.

LAURA had a great curiosity to see that personage who was called by her grandmother "the new young man." She had been detained at home by some accident on the day of his first appearance. Her father, however, had so consistently bored every one to death that evening by his account of the run, which would have filled three columns of *Bell*, and by the manifold excellences of his new St. Hubert, that Laura remembered that old Mrs. Squire, the huntsman's aged mother, had not been so well for two or three days, and that she was very much to blame for not having been to see her; and moreover, by-the-bye, that there was a new litter of puppies at the kennels, and she might as well step on from old Mrs. Squire's and see them. It pleased her father that she should sympathise with his favourite pursuits. Since the expedition of St. Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins, there never was a more innocent, more necessary expedition than this of Laura that winter morning. It was plainly her duty. Of course, if the New Young Man happened to be at the kennels, she would be rewarded by seeing that remarkable character. That he couldn't, by the wildest possibility, be

anywhere else at that time of the day never struck her—of course!

Still the Hannah-More half of her was in the ascendant to-day. It was a non-hunting day. She felt a craving to bolster herself up with formulas and precedents, after the manner of that school. Old Elspie, her Scotch nurse, was a great crony of Mrs. Squire, both being advanced Calvinists. Laura would just step up and ask her what she thought of Mrs. Squire's state, and if it was not necessary for her to go, why of course she would stay at home. She was going to do one of the most simple, natural things possible, to gratify her curiosity by looking at a new servant. And yet——, she would be glad of a false excuse for doing so; she would have been almost disappointed if Mrs. Squire had been better.

She went upstairs into a room, whose long-mullioned window looked upon the distant moor; and there she found an old and, physically speaking, very ugly old Scotchwoman, with a long hooked nose, and gleaming grey eyes. This old woman was dressed for walking, with an awful fantastic bonnet, and a crutched stiek like Mother Bunch's. Her father's joke struck her forcibly—Elspie did look very like a witch indeed!

“Elspie, dear,” she said, “have you heard how Mrs. Squire is?”

“She is just deceing,” was the answer, “and I'm awa to see her. There'll be manifestations when she is caught up, I'm thinking. Last night, while I sat with her, there came a sough of wind round the house, which would have swelled into music, if that ill-faured auld witch, Mother Carden, hadna been there. I ken of her tickling a paddock wi twa barley straes held crosswise, to change the wind. She should be burnt in bear strae herself, the witch. To depart from the gude honest auld practice of knouting aught thrums of hempen cord, with saxteen knots apiece, and calling twal times on—guide us where's my sneeshin—, which mony a time I've done myself, Gude forgie me, with the best success.”

Laura laughed loudly, kissed the old woman, and said she would go with her.

They walked slowly together through the shadows of the park, which comprised all the promontory between the narrow estuary of the Wyselith on the left, and the broad dangerous sands of the Avon on the right. Betwixt the tree-stems on either side they could see gleams of yellow sand and sea-green water. Where the trees broke, Morecombe Castle loomed up grandly on the other side of the river close at hand. There was no regular

avenue, but beyond the trees which bordered the carriage-way, the Moor, the mother of waters, was visible, and seemed to gladden old Elspie's Highland eyes.

She rattled on incessantly. It was a beautiful country, she said, to the blinded eyes of those who had never seen solitary Rannoch and lonely majestic Schehallion. God had left the people here to wax fat until they kicked, in proof of which He sent no snow; and twaddling on uncontradicted with her argument, no whisky and deil a screed of the pipes from ae year's end to the ither. The trout were but poor things, and the blessed salmon themselves were naething to the Scottish salmon, though, with her wonderful honesty, she confessed that she had never seen but one at Rannoch in her life. The Gospel in all its purity was preached here, she allowed, but in holes and corners; and then she gave Laura a piece of her mind about the High Church rector, and about what would happen to her (Laura) for the prominent part she was taking in the Christmas decorations of the church. But Laura only half heard her, for she was away on horseback, over a particular line of country, over which she had always hoped the fox would go, but over which he never did. Then Elspie went on to say that the people here were sunk in the grossest superstition, after which she rambled on into describing a never-failing spell of her own for doing something or another, "and then ye pit the thimble halfway betwixt the twa bannoeks, and ye turn to the four airts, and ye say four times to ilka airt—'Hech sirs, see to yon hoodie, she's waur I'm thinking.'"

The last sentence was not Elspie's incantation—it was only a natural exclamation. If she had said, "your twa dizzen hoodies," it would have been equally correct. They had arrived at Mrs. Squire's cottage, the last house in the village, close to the tideway, and there were Royston crows enough about in every direction.

They went in, but there was no one on the ground-floor. A man's voice was audible upstairs, apparently talking to the sick woman. Elspie immediately prepared for going upstairs in extreme wrath. The voice, as far as they could hear it, was the voice of Mr. Parsons the Tractarian rector. In Elspie's eyes the sin of a Romanising Episcopalian, like the Rector, daring to trouble the deathbed of an elected Calvinist with his miserable soulless formalisms, was a sin too horrible to be tolerated for a moment. She charged the stairs, and Laura shoved her up right willingly, knowing that her Highland respect for rank would prevent her insulting a guest of her father's house in his daughter's presence.

They came silently into the room of death, for it was so. She saw at once that it was not the Rector who was bending over the dying woman, but a stranger. She heard him say, "Mother, your assurance of salvation is so great that if I were a duke I would change with you. Think of your future, and think of the hell which is before me. Do you think I would not change with you?"

That was all they heard, for the next instant the stranger turned and saw them. Before he had time to do so, Laura's heart was melted with pity towards him; and when he did so, she looked on the most magnificent young man she had ever seen in her life.

There was more mischief done in the next five minutes than was thoroughly undone in the next five years. It was very wrong, and Mrs. Hannah More would have been very angry; but it *will* happen, you know, and it does. Poor Laura tried hard to undo that five minutes' work, but she never entirely did—circumstances were so fearfully against her.

A wonderfully splendid young fellow, very young, so young as to be beardless, yet well-grown and graceful. In her memory he lived as a perfectly beautiful young man, with large steadfast eyes, and a look of deep sorrow in them and in the whole of his face, which had not yet developed into despair.

As Elspie moved towards the bed, he rose and came towards them. He was singularly well-dressed, and looked the gentleman he was, every inch of him; there was no man in that part of the country who could compare with him. Hilton was grand enough in his way, but he wanted the keen vitality which dwelt in every look, every action of this one. Laura had never seen any one like him at all. She was very plainly dressed, as she generally was when about home. They could scarcely help speaking to one another. They both felt they were in the presence of death, and thought but little of forms or introductions. Each was only conscious that the other was wondrously attractive, and they talked like two children. He began—

"Death in such a form as he takes here loses all his terrors. The most selfish sybarite would hold out his white hands, and take him to his bosom, if he came in this form."

The young lady was the very last young lady in England to yield to any one in a conversation of this kind. She loved it with her whole soul. She plunged into it at once, looking frankly into the stranger's eyes—

"The death is beautiful. Yes! of course it is. But it is merely the corollary of the life. How could it be anything but

beautiful, after such a life : brutal ingratitude met with patient love and forgiveness—grinding poverty endured with saintlike patience—a charity which hoped all things and believed all things—helpful diligence towards those in affliction, and genial sympathy for those in prosperity? Of course her death is beautiful.”

“ So you think that the death will be peaceful according as the life has been good ? ”

“ Of course I do.”

“ Do you believe in the converse of your proposition ? Do you believe that no man after a life of misused opportunities, of anger, of frivolity which he despised, of aimless idleness which he loathed, would not take death in his arms as his dearest friend, just as this old woman is doing ? ”

“ No, I do not. Death to him would be the executioner with the mask and axe, not the angel with the crown of glory.”

“ That is not a very comfortable creed for those who seek death as a rest from misfortune and life-long trouble, which troubles evermore and will not cease troubling.”

“ No, it is not,” replied Laura. “ I did not mean it to be. If I ever met any one who was so supremely and sentimentally silly as to say in earnest what you have been advancing as a speculation, I should have much more to say on the subject.”

For she suddenly had to fall back on Mrs. Hannah More and the straitlaced regularities double-quick ; for this tall youth was dropping these sentimental platitudes out of his handsome mouth in such a careless, graceful, melodious manner, that she began to find that she must either get angry or cry.

They passed out of the house together, and parted with a bow. Laura was so trained to habit that she seldom departed from a plan she had laid down. She went on towards the kennels, more because she had started with that intention than because she cared to see much of the puppies. Her deeply-hidden design of seeing the New Young Man was no more ; she had forgotten all about him.

The old huntsman, a little weakened lean old man about sixty, son of the woman who was dying ; a man with a keen grey eye, which, though half hidden under his eyebrows, was always on yours, received her. They were on the flags together in amicable dispute about some one of the young hounds, which had been brought out for inspection, when the stranger whom she had only just left, and of whom she had not yet ceased thinking, came up and said to the huntsman—

“ I'll go across to Clercombe then, and fetch that puppy home.

I shall take Xicotencatl, or he'll be too fresh for you to-morrow. Mind you look at that dog's foot again, do not forget it." And so he went.

Laura had voice to ask Squire who that might be.

"The new gentleman, Miss," said the voice, which came from under the keen grey old eye.

"Do you mean the new whip?" she asked, in blank astonishment.

"I calls him the new master, Miss. I give way to him at once, and so he's took to ordering Sir Charles about now, and he seems to like it."

"You seem to like it too?" said Laura; "you take it very easily?"

"If gentlemen takes the place of whips, such as I must obey their orders," said Squire. "You weren't out a Tuesday, Miss?"

"You know I was not."

"Did Sir Charles mention to you or to her ladyship the fact that he wouldn't ride in a frock?"

"No. You mean the new whip, I suppose?"

"The new Dook I mean, of course, come out in a swallow-tailed pink like a gentleman. I point it out to him very gentle. 'I'm not going to ride in a frock,' he snaps. 'The master himself does,' I urged. 'The devil he does!' says he; 'then I suppose I must. But I am not going to wear that beastly thing the tailor sent home for me. I will have one built at Plymouth. Is there a decent tailor there?' And so he picks his horse and goes over. And he has been snapping my nose off because the tailor has not sent his coat in, and he is going to ride in his swallowtail to-morrow, and says he will apologise to Sir Charles if he thinks about it."

"Are all the Leicestershire men such dandies?" said Laura.

"It's to be hoped not, Miss," said old Squire, looking keenly at her with his grey old eye. "Foxhunting would be expensive if they were."

"Does he understand his business?"

"Not he. But he thinks he do, which is much; and he is a capital hand at giving orders, which is more. And he is cool."

"Cool over his fences, you mean?" said Laura.

"Cool with the field I mean," said Squire. "A Tuesday he rode The Elk, and he went over a big thing in front of your father, and waits for him. And Sir Charles comes up and he funks it, for it were a awful big thing, for fegs it were! And Mr. Hammersley goes round and opens the gate for him; and I

hearn him say, 'We shouldn't have funk'd that ten years ago, Sir Charles—hey?' And your father says, 'That is a regular Leicestershire trick, to ride a man's best horse, that could carry his ten pounds extra, and then chaff him for not taking his fences.' But he laughed again, and he said, 'No, Sir Charles, it won't do. It's the ten years, not the ten pounds. Old Time has handicapped us all.' And when we checked the first time, he offered his cigar-case to Tom Downes who asked to be introduced, and looked mad when he found out who he was. That is what *I* call coolness. But he always were the best of the lot, say what you will."

"Best of what lot?" asked Laura.

"Of the Leicestershire lot, Miss," replied the old fellow, quickly. "They are a troublesome lot for the most part, Miss, as you will find when you get to know the world as well as I do. Too gentlemanly, for instance. But this young man, he is what I call a model."

"Are they all gentlemen?" asked Laura.

"Not all on 'em, Miss. This young man is perhaps rather exasperating gentlemanlike. But they all have the same ways, in some degree."

Laura went home again: knowing in the inmost recesses of her soul, in her consciousness, that something had happened to her, which the intelligent and the emotional part of her equally refused to recognise—a something, which those two-thirds of her soul, which lay nearest to the surface, absolutely refused to name. Her intelligence would not, as yet, tell herself, nor would her emotions, as yet, allow her to tell anybody else, that she had fallen in love with this young gentleman. If her intelligence had told this fact to herself, or if her emotions had got so far out of the guidance of Hannah-Moreism as to allow her to tell it to any one else, she would have been covered with shame and indignation. But she knew it perfectly well; and was most heartily frightened, as was the German student, when he left his monster in his room, and feared to come back there for fear of meeting it, in all its monstrous horror. There are three ways of *knowing* things; she had only got to the first as yet. Familiar intercourse was to give her the second, grief the third.

Meanwhile that most unaccountable old trot Mother Nature had been casting her kevel-ropes, and had arranged that these two young people should fall in love with one another. What that means exactly we none of us know. But it happened here most unmistakably.

CHAPTER XII.

LAURA passed the rest of that day in the most praiseworthy activity. Her poor people done, she armed herself with a Biographical Dictionary, and settled steadily down to Froude's first volume, which had just arrived, to work at it till lunch-time. What had passed that morning she chose to ignore utterly to herself. She once went so far as to make the admission, "I was very nearly being silly this morning. I was not at all myself. It was that poor woman's approaching death upset me." Nothing more than this. She determined on an expansive course of study of the Tudor times, got out a new manuscript book, in the which to take notes, determined to be utterly sceptical about Mr. Froude's conclusions, and diligently to spy out every deficiency. She got her pens, ink, MS. book, and blotting-paper all ready, settled herself at the writing-table with the volume before her, and then sat down and began thinking about the incomprehensible impudence of this wonderful Hammersley, until she found it wouldn't do, and went to work in serious sober earnest. Her diligence met with its reward; for after reading steadily till lunch-time, practising until the carriage came round, making herself agreeable to Lord Hatterleigh and her grandmother during their drive, and writing letters for her father till the dressing-bell rang, she found that the little something which had existed in the morning had ceased to exist, and that she was in a mood of lofty scorn with herself, for having in the deepest, dimmest, seven-fold depths of her soul allowed that anything of that kind had for an instant existed.

A mood of lofty self-scorn is seen probably to better advantage on the stage than in the drawing-room. The drawing-room, I take it, is, to use our modern elegant language, a sphere devoted to the gentler and more elegant emotions. The proper place for tantrums is the library, or, if you have such an apartment, the ancestral hall, with the portraits of your forefathers scowling gloomily down on the petty passions of their ephemeral and degenerate successors. Laura had no business to bring her scorn into the drawing-room and frighten her grandmother, not to mention astonishing (no, he couldn't be astonished, he never got so high as that), surprising Lord Hatterleigh to that extent that he feared there was an insufficient quantity of pepsine in his dinner-pills.

"What have you done to-day, Miss Seckerton?" he asked her, leaning back with his legs stretched out and folded before him.

“ Been foolish all the morning, and trying to persuade myself that I had been nothing of the kind all the afternoon,” replied Laura. “ Do you ever do that ? ”

“ What ! make a fool of myself ? ”

“ No ; of course you do that ; we all do. I mean, do you ever try to persuade yourself that you haven’t ? ”

This being considerable nonsense sounded obscure and difficult, and Lord Hatterleigh brought his mind to bear upon it. He refolded his legs slowly, putting the one lately underneath uppermost, folded his hands on the pit of his stomach, and said, to begin—“ Say that again, will you, Miss Seckerton ? ”

“ It was hardly worth saying the first time,” she answered ; “ I certainly can’t say it twice over.”

This was very disconcerting, and he sat perfectly silent for a time, and then made another attempt to talk. But she would not talk to him to-day. She was not in the humour to tolerate his weary platitudes, and she let him see it. She was unkind to him for the first time in her life. She disturbed him so much by her brusquerie and petulance that he felt it necessary to go for a jog-trot ride on one of his three hobbyhorses to forget it. The medical horse was unavailable in the present company ; he had been riding his political horse all day, to Sir Charles’s intense exasperation. So he mounted the genealogical palfrey, and went out for a ride with old Lady Southmolton. He put her gently in her saddle when he gave her his arm in to dinner, and with the exception of a blundering gallop on his political cob, when the men were left over their wine, rambled with her through green lanes of pedigrees until bedtime ; and even over his wine-and-water at eleven, after she had gone to bed, seemed strongly inclined to penetrate as far as her venerated bedroom, and correct her for some blunder which he averred she had made, were it only through the keyhole.

“ Who was that Lady Mary Saunders we saw to-day ? ” he began, as he was taking her in ; “ the little yellow woman with the wig, at the red-brick house with the beehives on the lawn—a very well-bred woman indeed, husband a Tory.”

“ She was a Spettigue.”

“ Which Spettigues, the Cromer or the Scilly Spettigues ? ”

“ Neither. She belongs to the half-way house ; she is the third daughter of Lord Mapledurham.”

“ Oh, a Spettigoo ” (so he pronounced it). “ They have dropped the ‘ e,’ my dear Lady Southmolton, in the present generation. Wasn’t there something about one of her brothers ? I seem to fancy that there was.”

“Nothing very much ; Charles lives away from his wife.”

“Aha !” said Lord Hatterleigh, “and how was that ?”

“I hardly know. There were two sides to the story. She has got her party, and he has got his. Some say that he treated her very badly, and some say she gave him good cause. Sir Harry Poyntz was furious at having his name mixed up in it.”

“Oh, *he* was in it, was he ?”

“He says he was not.”

“All the more——. Do *you* know Sir Harry Poyntz, my dear Lady Southmolton ?”

“I have known him and his from a boy.”

“What do you think of him ?”

“I try to think the best of him.”

“I should not like to have his character,” said Lord Hatterleigh. “They say he is profligate beyond precedent, false beyond contempt, and avaricious beyond—beyond thingamy !”

“It is rather hard to accuse him of avarice, I think,” said the kind old lady. “He has succeeded in clearing the estate, which was dipped so shamefully by his father.”

“No, really ; I thought it would have taken years more to do it.”

“So did every one else. But see, he has done it. He has refused to renew Mr. Huxtable’s lease of the Castle, and is to be our next-door neighbour after the end of this year.”

“Then, will people call on him ?”

“I should suppose, of course, they will,” said Lady Southmolton. “He has done nothing which would give them any excuse for such an extreme measure as not doing so.”

“Why, no. But I could like a man more, far more, who had made one grand *fiasco*. For instance, Colonel Ikey has made a mess of it, an awful mess, and he don’t show. But I tell you honestly, I would sooner be Ikey behind his cloud, than I would keep my name on my club-books with Sir Harry Poyntz’ reputation. He will never step over the line, but if he ever did, no man would be found to say, ‘Poor Harry Poyntz !’”

“I want to make the best of him,” said Lady Southmolton.

“You always want to make the best of everybody ; you Lees always do, you know. You can’t help it ; goodness is in your blood ; you have given yourselves to peacemaking for these two centuries. But all the Lees since the Conquest won’t whitewash this fellow ; he is too utterly ill-conditioned. He has a brother, has he not ?”

“Yes ; just gone to India.”

“By the same mother ?”

“ Oh yes. Robert Poyntz ; I remember him as a pretty bright boy—a very nice boy.”

“ There is another brother, I heard of the other day only—a Falconbridge, a splendid fellow by all descriptions ; have you ever heard of him ? ”

“ I have heard of such a person, but I never, never heard of his splendour. I have always understood him to be a sad *mauvais sujet*. A very disreputable person, is he not ? ”

“ No. I have heard no harm of him worse than that he was riding steeplechases, or acting as huntsman or something, in Leicestershire last year. He seemed to be a somewhat remarkable fellow—a youth who seemed to play Count Saxe to old Sir George Poyntz’ August der Starke. What do you know about Robert Poyntz, the brother ? ”

“ I am afraid but very little good,” said Lady Southmolton. “ I fear he is very dissipated. Why ? ”

“ Because he will soon be in possession. Sir Harry Poyntz is a doomed man ; he has ruined his constitution by profligacy, and has had one or more attacks of angina pectoris. You will have this Robert Poyntz at the Castle in a couple of years, mark my words ! ”

So Lord Hatterleigh and Lady Southmolton. Let us see what the others were talking about. Laura was sitting next to Lord Hatterleigh ; but he did not speak to her, for she had frightened him. He calmed himself by talking to that well-conducted old Lady Southmolton. As I said before, he did not feel equal to Laura for the rest of the evening. She was very much pleased at not having to amuse him, and most willingly left him to talk with her grandmother. But we shall have to follow the conversation at what may properly be called the noisy end of the table, as distinguished from the quiet end where Lord Hatterleigh mumbled and spluttered as above to Lady Southmolton. Lady Emily tried not to yawn, and Sir Peckwich Downes, who, from his figure, seemed to have three stomachs, ruminated over his dinner, listening to Lord Hatterleigh, and confined his observations to saying in a deep voice, “ Sherry ! ” whenever the butler offered him champagne, or any frivolous drinks of that kind. We will take up the conversation at the noisy end.

THE VICAR.—“ I deny your position, Colonel Hilton. The great Bithynian Council was merely assembled for the purpose of condemning Arianism. That was its *spécialité*. I deny that I am bound by it further than that. As regards sumptuary laws for the priesthood, it did absolutely nothing. It left them to be developed by the Western Church——”

COLONEL HILTON.—“The Papists.”

THE VICAR.—“The Western Church, sir. Thus our chasuble is developed from the blanket of the shepherd of the Campagna, our dalmatic from——”

SIR GEORGE.—“But where are you to stop in your development. We fox-hunters, about the middle of the last century, developed our vestments into breeches and top-boots, and there we have stuck for a hundred years. But lately a number of young fellows have shown signs of moving forward again, and have appeared in grey cords and butchers’ boots. One of your boys, Huxtable, rode last week in knickerbockers, and went very well forward indeed. I was very much offended; I could not bear the sight of it. But if you allow that Pu—, I mean that Church vestments, were developed out of something which went before, I cannot see at what point you are to stop that development, any more than I can stop breeches and top-boots from developing into knickerbockers and gaiters.”

THE VICAR.—“The development should stop, sir, the instant that the original idea of the vestment is lost.”

LAURA (from her end).—“I agree with the Vicar. Let us use these Church vestments as long as any idea worth preserving is preserved by them. I believe in symbols. If you are to wear anything at all, let it mean something. A gown and surplice mean nothing at all. Now, Mr. Spurgeon, when he goes into the pulpit with a blue necktie and a white hat, *does* mean something—a something *I* don’t like; but, at all events, he means something, however offensive it may be to me.”

COLONEL HILTON.—“I am converted. Miss Seekerton has put it so well. I see that we must either have Bryan King, with his albs and his dalmatiques, or we must have Spurgeon, with his white bowler hat and blue tie.”

LAURA.—“You are very easily converted, Colonel Hilton.”

COLONEL HILTON.—“Very easily indeed—by you.”

LAURA.—“Thank you. That means that you are never in earnest about anything.”

COLONEL HILTON (in his softest voice).—“Only very much in earnest about one thing.”

LAURA (looking at him with strong disfavour).—“And what may that be, for instance?”

The Colonel, reduced to silence for a moment, and feeling that he had somehow done just what he did not want to do, said, “Is it really true, Mr. Huxtable, that we are to lose you, and that Sir Harry Poyntz is coming to the castle?”

Mr. Huxtable, a jolly Lancashire giant, said, “Indeed it is.

He will neither sell, nor give me another lease. And I have offered him a fancy price too. It is a sad pity for the Conservative interest. If I had lived in that dear inconvenient old castle a few years more, I should have turned a Tory. Lord bless you! No one could stand the atmosphere of the dear old place. Lock John Bright up a year or two in a Norman keep, with a deer park, and you would find him walking arm-in-arm with Disraeli into the Carlton."

THE VICAR.—"The atmosphere of——"

MR. HUXTABLE.—"That is just what I mean. As the atmosphere of Magdalen turned you Tractarian, so the atmosphere of the dear old place would turn me Tory, I shall go back to Manchester, build a red-brick house, or go in for a six-pound suffrage to begin with—only begin with, understand. And I shall also turn dissenter. Ha! ha!"

THE VICAR.—"My good Sir——"

"I know all about that, Vicar. It's all a matter of atmosphere, you know. Hey? *εις εαυτὸν στόμαχον*—hey? But, seriously, it does make a man talk radically and wildly, to find himself turned out of such glorious quarters as these, to make room for a profligate usurer."

THE VICAR.—"I can quite conceive it. I wish to heaven that Sir Harry would sell to you. Since you have been here you have done nothing but good. You have strengthened my hands at every point, although you have often disagreed with me. And now you are to make room for a profligate atheistic usurer."

SIR CHARLES.—"My dear Vicar!"

The Vicar only looked at Sir Charles, and Sir Charles held his tongue and carved the venison."

COLONEL HILTON.—"I am afraid that Mr. Huxtable has been pauperising the labourers hereabouts with his liberality. They have got to depend on him as a *deus ex Machina*. Nothing can be more demoralising than that. You are a capital political economist, Miss Seekerton; you will agree with me."

LAURA.—"I don't see how Mr. Huxtable, with all his ingenuity, can have succeeded in pauperising men with eleven shillings a week, three to five children, two shillings a week off for rent, a pound a year to the doctor, which brings them down to little over eight shillings, out of which they have to find boots, clothes, and firing."

COLONEL HILTON (somewhat nettled at having put his foot in it again).—"It's a case of supply and demand, I suppose."

LAURA.—"So I suppose. It is a positive fact that the agricultural population could not get on at all without artificial

assistance from the gentry ; and I suppose we don't help them from Christian good-will, but only to prevent the ricks from catching fire. Is that what you mean ? ”

Laura was behaving very badly. Her father was pained and astonished. What she said might be true, but she had no business to speak in that way. What right had she to talk about rick-burning ? No lady ever did.

Kind Mr. Huxtable saw all this, and came to the rescue with the best intentions—with one of those intentions with which a silly, lying old proverb says that “hell is paved.” He made, on the whole, a rather worse mess of it ; but his meaning was good ; and by no means the sort of thing with which to pave hell. He tried to “change the conversation,” a thing I have never yet seen done with the slightest success. If the conversation gets awkward, diligently try to *lead* it into a new channel ; but don't change it, and leave the whole of the company in a nervous disconcerted frame of mind, each wondering whether or not he or she has said the Dreadful Thing which made such a terrible remedy necessary.

“That is a splendid young fellow—that new whip of yours—Sir Charles, if I may take the liberty of calling him so.”

Sir Charles agreed that he was.

“Thrown away here though,” continued Huxtable.—“Goes too straight for this country ; won't learn to potter. He will go at something half a size too big for him some day, and come to grief. I saw him go at some terrible things the day before yesterday.”

“I wonder if I could enlist him,” said Colonel Hilton. “He would make a capital dragoon.”

“He is a cut above *that* sort of thing, I fancy,” said Laura, who seemed determined to behave worse as the evening got later.

Colonel Hilton was getting angry with her. She had given him the door two or three times without the slightest offence on his part, and he was not going to stand it.

“Do you think, then, that a whip to hounds holds a higher position than that of the light cavalry who were at Balaclava ? ”

“I say nothing about them,” said Laura. “But you must acknowledge, as a general rule, that the army is recruited from the lowest class in the community, and that you never get a man to enlist if he can do anything else with himself.”

“That is hardly to the point. I deny it ; but that has nothing to do with the argument. What I asked was, do not you think that the position of a trooper, who may have the Victoria Cross, which I wear myself, pinned on to his coat by the most august person in the world, is superior to a menial servant dressed in a

private livery, who feeds the hounds, and drowns the blind puppies?"

"It depends very much on the way you take it," said Laura, who had nothing whatever to say, and so said that.

"I don't think it does," said Colonel Hilton. "To bring the matter to practice. I sit at mess with a man whose father, till last year, was working as a journeyman blacksmith on Finsbury Pavement. He was sergeant-major in the 14th Hussars, and got his commission for service; and as it is best for a man who rises from the ranks to change his regiment, he came to us. We received him with open arms. That man is a trusted companion of mine, one of the best officers I have. I can make a friend of that man, but I don't think I could stand a menial servant—a mere minister to luxury, a kennel-boy. If there are to be any rules about that sort of thing, I am right; if not, I am wrong."

These sentiments were far too near the creed of most present to be contradicted. A short silence ensued, which was more flattering than applause, during which Laura was thinking,

"So you *have* got a temper, and *won't* always stand contradiction, eh, Colonel Hilton? Well, I like you the better for it."

It was broken by Sir Peckwich Downes, who, as he had finished his venison, and had as much sherry as he wanted, got tired of thinking what a queer lopsided young gaby Lord Hatterleigh was, and felt conversational. He put a knife up his sleeve, and said:—

"This winter venison of yours is too fat. Winter venison always is. But it is not bad-flavoured. Give me the old rule: a buck a week till September; neck o' Tuesday week, haunch o' Thursday week. There is the same difference between a Paris chicken and a nice young spring Dorking, in my estimation.* Your fawn, again, is new-fashioned and hasty."

Sir Charles thought that the conversation was changed, and that there were better times before him. He tried to catch Sir Peckwich's eye, and bring him into the talk. But his eye had a long way to travel, and before it got to Sir Peckwich it was arrested by a stony stare from the Vicar.

"I suppose," said the Vicar to the unhappy baronet, in a severe clerical voice, "that when Sir Harry Poyntz comes to the castle, you will find it necessary to dismiss your new master of the buckhounds."

That finished him. When the ladies were gone, he sat down over his wine, saying to himself—

* The worthy baronet is possibly obscure to some of our readers, but in these days we cannot edit him.

“Confound these moles of parsons! How the deuce did he find *that* out? And how, in the name of all confusion, did he know that I knew it?”

But he was not to be beat by fifty vicars, when he was in an obstinate mood. In spite of the Vicar’s deprecation, he insisted on seeing him through the darkest part of the park, and as he left him said—

“What did you mean, Vicar, by saying that I must discharge my man when Sir Harry Poyntz came?”

“You know as well as I do,” said the Vicar.

“Do you think,” asked Sir Charles, “that Harry Poyntz knows the relation in which this young man stands to him?”

“As well as you or I do,” said the Vicar. “Henry is, as you know, my relation. I got the living from his father, and am in constant communication with himself. He knows who this young man is as well as I do.”

“I am afraid it won’t do to keep him here, then,” said Sir Charles.

“It won’t do for one instant,” said the Vicar. “It is not to be thought of for a moment.”

“I suppose not,” said Sir Charles, stroking his chin. “Well, I am very sorry, for he is a charming gentleman, and I should have liked such a son.”

“You haven’t seen much of him yet, have you?” said the Vicar.

“Why no,” said Sir Charles.

“Ah!” said the Vicar, “so I thought.”

“Is he a very bad fellow, then?” asked Sir Charles.

“There is a natural depravity in our human nature”—began the Vicar, very slowly.

“I didn’t mean that sort of thing,” replied Sir Charles, quickly.

“I know you didn’t,” said the Vicar, looking steadily at him. “I know what you mean, and I answer that the human heart is naturally depraved. You are depraved, you know. As for me, I am a most graceless sinner.”

“Well, well!” said Sir Charles, impatiently. “Is this young gentleman so extra depraved that I must send him about his business?”

“You want an excuse,” said the Vicar.

“I don’t want any excuse,” said Sir Charles. “Is he any worse than you or I, then?”

“Not much, but it won’t do to have him here after Harry Poyntz comes.”

“ Does he know who he is ? ”

“ Perfectly.”

“ Does he know that you know who he is ? ”

“ Not in the least,” said the Vicar. “ Pack him off about his business. Do you know the dew is very heavy ? Good-night.”

CHAPTER XIII.

It is one thing to go to bed with your brain active from conversation and company, brimful of to-morrow's plans ; and quite another to find, after you are in bed, that this tiresome brain of yours will go on grinding, utterly refusing to stop, like Mrs. Crowe's mechanical church organ, and declines to sink into sleep ; nay, sooner than do that, will go on playing foolish old psalm-tunes, against your pillow, until you don't know whether the weary measure comes from your head or from the pillow. Under these circumstances, as hour after hour of the weary night goes on, the plans of the morning become hateful ; every past sin, every past omission, every future contingency of evil becomes prominent and immediate. Life seems a weary mistake, and that darkest midnight thought of all, that death must and will come sooner or later, is apt to sit and brood upon your pillow.

Laara did not feel all this. It was to come to her. But she had what her mother or her grandmother would have called “ a wretched night.” There was a little dumb, dull imp abroad this night, which was not to be named, whose existence was not to be allowed under penalties too horrible for contemplation—a fiend unnamed, unrecognised, yet horribly real. For as she lay awake, with all the phantasmagoria of an excited brain passing before her so distinctly that some of the most vivid images were actually reflected on her retina, this little imp contrived at every opportunity, at every pause in the procession of incongruous images, to hold up the face of one man before her, and grin from behind it—the face of the man whom she wished she had never seen, whom she hated, and wished dead.

Why should she hate him and wish him dead ? Because she knew she was going to fall in love with him, and did not yet actually realise that she had. And she had teased Colonel Hilton until, quite unconsciously on his part and on hers, he had given her three or four deep stabs in the heart. He had spoken so dreadfully of this man.

At last these brain phantasmagoria grew so exceeding incongruous that she began to hope she was asleep, but only found that she was not by watching the dull silvered light of the moon upon her window-blinds. At last it came like a dim grey cloud. The last feeling of outward sensation was a happy weariness upon her eyelids, which drooped and drooped till they opened no more. Then the images were as incongruous as ever, but their incongruity was no longer felt. She had passed into the land where incongruity becomes logical, nay, commonplace. There was the form of a beautiful woman lying in a bed, with no outward signs of vitality except a gentle heaving at the breast; but where that woman *was* for the next two hours I don't know, and none of the authors I have consulted seem able to tell me.

“Easier to prove the existence of spirit than to prove the existence of matter?” I should rather think it was!

The appearance of a very commonplace maid, very sleepy, and in reality very cross, although making a praiseworthy effort to look good-humoured, with a candle and a jug of warm water at seven o'clock on a cold November morning, acts as a foil for this sort of thing. I deny the charge of bathos, or of an *ad captandum* contrast. If life had not perpetually these commonplace turns, we should wander sentimentally through this life with Shelley, Byron, and Heinè, bemoaning the state of a world which we have never raised a finger to mend. Thank Heaven! we have got out of *that* sort of thing now. From the *Saturday Review* down to the *Tiser* every man has got his shoulder honestly to the wheel. Where they are going to shove us to is a question which has all the pleasures of profound uncertainty.

If ever there was a young lady in an unsentimental—not to say cross—frame of mind, it was Laura on that November morning. If ever there was a young lady who wondered why on earth that idiot of a girl couldn't have had the tact to oversleep herself, or to say that she (Laura) was ill, it was Laura. If ever there was a young lady who thought that foxhunting could only yield to the national game of cricket, as a gigantic and intolerable humbug, it was Laura.

It was only duty, or the habit of duty, which made her get up at all. Her father would miss her—

“And still her sire the wine would chide,
If it was not filled by Rosabel.”

It is a good thing to get up early of a morning for the sake of other folks. The kindest and least cynical of men said that getting-up early made you conceited all the morning, and sleepy

all the afternoon, but that is scarcely fair. She found her reward quickly. The dark nonsensical waking dreams of the night were gone, and her temper had come back. While her maid was doing her hair, she was so far herself as to ask, "What sort of morning is it, Susan?"

"A bittiful scenting morning, Miss. You've only got to put your nose out of doors to see it," said Susan, who was the huntsman's daughter. "They meets to Winkworthy, don't em, Miss?"

"Yes; and I suppose we shall go straight for the moors and get home about midnight. I don't feel up to a long run. I wish we met nearer home."

Her father was helping himself to tongue at the sideboard when she got into the breakfast-room. "My darling," he said, "I don't want to startle you, but I forgot to speak to you last night. I want you to ride 'The Elk' to-day. Are you afraid?"

"Not I," laughed Laura; "but why? Has he ever carried a lady?"

"He has carried a lady. Colonel Seymour warranted him to do so, and Hammersley has been riding him with a cloth, and pronounced him perfect. The reason I want you to ride him is that, as Hammersley pointed out, Witchcraft is not up to your weight in those heavy upland clays. I think he is right."

"That settles the matter," said Laura. "If our new lord and master has issued his orders that I am to ride 'The Elk' I submit, of course. Have you made any arrangements for getting me on to the top of him?"

"Yes," said Sir Charles; "Lord Hatterleigh is going to hoist you on from the top of a pair of steps."

"And if I get thrown?"

"If you get thrown, you must drive him against an eight-foot stone-wall, and get up on to him from that, in the best way you can."

And so they laughed away over their breakfast, and were happy, and Laura's long night was as though it had never been.

This horse "The Elk" was a character in his way, and in consequence of what happened afterwards, is still remembered well in the family. His height was eighteen hands and a trifle, his colour very light chestnut, his temper that of a Palmerston: not a very handsome horse—no concentration of vast speed, beauty, and mad vitality, like "Lord Cliefden;" a horse with the forehand of "Fisherman," with Barclay and Perkins' quarters, and the gaskins of "Umpire;" a great deal more like William

Pocock than like Robert Coombes—a great deal more like Thomas King than Thomas Sayers: a vast sweet-tempered horse, whose speed and staying qualities were like the military excellence of the British and American armies, requiring time to show them, but when once shown, amazing: an elephantine, clumsy, Teutonic sort of beast, with his shoulders sloped back to his girth, and his ribs back to his flank: nothing Norman about him at all, except a beautiful thin arched neck, and a little nervous head: out of which, however, gleamed a large, speculative, kindly, and most thoroughly Teutonic eye.

Sir Charles refused five hundred guineas for him. His early history is extremely obscure, merely, I think, legendary. If he was ever in the service of Messrs. Chaplin and Horne, how did he get to Dublin?—though it is equally certain that he was never bred, and most certainly never broken, in Ireland. Even *his* temper would never have stood an Irish breaking. After what I have said, it will be evident that “The Elk’s” pedigree was still more obscure than “The Elk’s” education.

He first made his appearance in civilised society at Plymouth. Haskerton, of Bear Down, who stood six-feet-two in his stockings, and weighed nineteen stone, married a Scotch lady, who was six feet in *her* stockings, and weighed, say, twelve. They had a big baby, height and weight unknown, purchased a six-foot groom out of a dragoon regiment, a pair of eighteen-hand horses, of which “The Elk” was one, and had the biggest phaeton built that old Long Acre had ever turned out; and with this elephantine equipage used to charge up and down the roads in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, to the terror of the peaceable inhabitants.

“Talk to me about the decadence of Englishmen!” said Sir Peckwich Downes to Lady Southmolton on one occasion. “Why, if Haskerton, with those horses, that wife, that phaeton, that groom, and that baby, were to charge full-speed against the whole French army, they would fly like sheep!”

Lady Southmolton was obliged to allow that such a thing was very probable. She herself was possessed of the hereditary courage of an Englishwoman; yet whenever she, in her pony-carriage, met this terrific engine of war, guided by Haskerton of Bear Down, in a narrow lane, she always (to use yachting slang) put her helm down, took a strong pull on the starboard rein, got into the ditch, and remained there, bowing like a Limoges china figure, until the terrible Squire, baby and all, had raged on past her like a cyclone.

Sir Charles had looked “the Elk” over; had offered Haskerton another horse of the same size, and ten pounds. Haskerton didn’t

see his way to the ten pounds—rather thought the ten pounds should go the other way; thought Sir Charles wrong about the horse; but still Sir Charles said he was never wrong about a horse, and so the horse was sent home.

And now Laura found herself mounted on his vast carcass, declaring she should roll off, and making the dull misty morning beautiful with her ringing laughter.

It was a very dull morning, with a slow-sucking wind from the southward. There was no fog on the lower country, but after they had risen about a hundred feet the trees began to drop, and they were enveloped in the mist. Sometimes it would lift and brighten, and rise to higher elevations as the day went on; but it was a dull melancholy day to all non-foxhunting mortals, but a bright one enough to Laura and her father. They had one another; all the world was behind them, and a day's sweet enjoyment before.

As they shogged on comfortably together they came round the turn of a lane, and lo! a gleam of white and a forest of waving tails; in another moment the hounds had seen their master, had rushed forward to meet him, and were crowding joyously around. A pleasant sight always, as I remember it, was the meeting of hounds and master in the fresh morning.

The approach to Winkworthy was through ground which was not yet reclaimed from its original state, although rich and cultivable; heavy yellow clay, with forest of oak and holly; and passing along through the dim aisles of it, they came at last on the breezy hill of Winkworthy, and a few faithful ones who faced the dark morning and the distant meet.

Sir Charles was the tallest man there; his very lean spare figure and his broad shoulders looked very well on horseback, not to mention his leg, which he and others thought to be the finest leg in Devonshire, and which was certainly as well-dressed a leg as any in that county or any other:—altogether a most gallant-looking gentleman, as straight as a dart.

Dickson, the attorney from Totridge, who had ridden up and looked keenly at him, was speaking to him when the hounds were put in; but Laura called him away, and they took their places, with three or four other hard-goers, at the upper corner of the little patch of gorse. The rest of the field were not in order—were talking, smoking, and so on; but our friends knew what they were about. The hounds were no sooner in than they were out again on the other side, with a long-legged mountain fox before them, and going fifteen miles an hour straight for the moor.

As soon as Laura got used to the elephantine stride of "The Elk," she found that she was away from the others, with only her

father and the huntsman alongside of her, and Hammersley, who had kept out of her sight till now, sailing gallantly on in front, showing them the way. He *could* ride, there was no doubt of that; and a man master of his horse, going hard, is one of the most beautiful sights in the world. Hammersley knew that as well as you or I.

Laura went storming along, enjoying herself thoroughly. They were rapidly approaching the moor, when, after leaping some not very difficult timber, she missed her father. He had come to grief, and was chasing his horse into a corner of the stone wall, so there was nothing much the matter with him. And Laura went on, the more particularly as it was doubtful whether she could have pulled Elk with any great success. She had just begun to realise that she was away alone with Hammersley, when they were up and out on the moor, and into a dense mist; and he had drawn back and was riding nearer to her, as was absolutely necessary.

How far they went she did not know then. The ground was tolerably smooth—heather with very little rock—and they went fast, just keeping sight of the hounds. They were going along a ridge, for Laura saw, first on one side and then on the other, a precipitous slope below her, with hanging cliffs festooned by the mist—saw and did not like it.

At last, suddenly, Hammersley held up his hand and shouted to her to stop. She pulled up in time, but he, watching her, was too late. They had come suddenly on a loose broken slope of weatherworn granite boulders among the heather, and he had ridden on to it before he could pull up. There was a fierce struggling clatter for half a minute, and then horse and man came crashing down together among the cruel pitiless rocks.

He was thrown clear of his horse, and fell partly behind a small rock, so that she could only see his leg. At first the knee was raised, but after a moment it fell over on its side and remained still. She began to get frightened. "Are you hurt?" she cried out; but there was no answer, he lay quite still. Around in the mist she could only hear the faint cry of the running hounds getting fainter each moment, and the trickling of some hidden rannel beneath the stones hard by. She cried for help—there was but little chance of that. Her voice only echoed among the rocks for an instant—after that silence again, and she began to feel that she was alone with Death!

Dead or alive, she must go to him; the higher law told her that. She had never seen death yet, but she must look on him for the first time, now, here, in the darkened face of that man—of that

man of all others ! She slipped from her horse, and scrambled towards him.

Was this death, this loose attitude of all the limbs, this quiet resting of the cheek upon the arm ? If so it was hardly terrible, nay, somewhat beautiful ! But it was not death ; for the head shifted, the soul came back, and a sharp cry told that pain had returned with consciousness.

Laura's face flushed up with sheer honest joy. She would have felt the same glad bound at her heart, had he who was lying before her been the merest old lazar which lay by the roadside. Our hatred of death is so ingrained into our nature, as the greatest and most terrible of evils, that we rejoice beyond measure when his threatened darkness passes away from the most worthless face, and leaves the light of life flickering there again, however foul and worthless that light may be. Poor Laura did not know as yet how precious this life was to get to her ! It was only in the reaction of her terror that she rejoiced now, and went innocently to his assistance. She was strong, and she raised him into an easier position. She was knowing, to a certain extent, in the way of nursing, and she unloosed his neck. She was curious, and she wondered what was this thick gold chain about his neck, and whether it was his sweetheart's portrait which hung so heavy from it down on his breast : and she was an artist, and she saw that he was very, very handsome. She raised her voice once more, and cried " Help ! " three times, and the circumambient mist and the rocky hollows around re-echoed " Help ! " Poor child, she wanted it as much as he did ; God help her !

It was not long before " The Elk," who had been elephantinely grazing, raised his head and whinnied. He had heard, quicker than could she, swift horses' feet brushing through the heather. When she caught the sound she cried, " Pull up, we have had an accident. Father ! is that you ? " She heard the approaching horse pass into a walk, and then out of the mist came not her father but Tom Squire the old huntsman.

He saw what had happened directly. He jumped from his horse and came towards them, with his little bright terrier eyes sparkling from one to the other. " Is he dead ? " he said first, and then he took off his cap. " Go and get it full of water, Miss. Your father is close behind. Quick ! "

She went, and as she came back she heard her father pricking on towards them, and called on him to draw rein. What did she see ? The old huntsman bending down over the hurt man, moving his hair from his eyes, and using such endearments towards him as a father uses towards a favourite son ; and the wounded man

smiling back into his face with a patronising kindly confidence, which puzzled her exceedingly.

Her father came up, and they took stock of the disaster. The man was only stunned, and his collar-bone put out, and he could ride home with assistance. Colonel Hilton and Sir Charles' second horseman came next. Colonel Hilton cleverly tied him up in pocket-handkerchiefs, and he was sent home on the second horse with the groom. Others came up then, and it was determined to hunt the hounds, who must be a few miles off by this time, and make a day of it.

So they did. A glorious day they had! Laura rejected with scorn the idea of going home, was hoisted on "The Elk" by Colonel Hilton, and went on. But all that concerns us in that day is this.

Sir Charles and the huntsman rode first, Laura and the Colonel behind. The Colonel was in one of his complimentary humours again, for his theory was that, although women kicked against that sort of thing, they must like it, and that it told in the long run. So he and Laura (who never could bear him when he did not contradict her) had (if you will let me say so) fallen together by the ears—I mean quarrelled—to that extent that Laura, after a biting sarcasm, not handed down to us in the family archives, and therefore suppliable by the reader's imagination, had, with her riding-whip, banged and thwacked "The Elk" into a canter, and pushed on to join her father and the huntsman, leaving Colonel Hilton to fall back on the society of a talkative horse-doctor with a grievance against Lieutenant James.

As she came up she heard her father and the huntsman talking together.

"Then you knew him and liked him in his youth?"

"Yes, Sir Charles. The best of the bunch, Sir—the best of the bunch!"

"He has not been treated fairly, say what you will," replied Sir Charles. "Is there no hope for mercy for him?"

"There is no mercy there, Sir Charles," said the little old man, looking up at him. "Let those who have to ask mercy remember that."

Her father, she saw, turned sharply on the old man as he said this, but he turned away again, and rode on as stiff and as grand as ever.

"His is a sad story," she heard him say.

"A very, very sad story, Sir!—sadder than you dream of," said the huntsman. And when she came up to them they began talking of where the hounds might be.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE only woman of her own age whom Laura called friend was Maria Huxtable, the tenant of the Castle's daughter; a tall, beautiful, though somewhat loud daughter of Lancashire: as handsome in person as Laura, as like her as she could manage to be in manners, by unassisted unguided imitation, and a still more successful replica of Laura in her dress, in which particular a reproduction of ideas is more mechanical, and therefore more easy. The only particular difference between them seemed at first sight to be, that Laura had that trained far-gazing look of eye, the "not speak till you're spoken to" look, which is mainly got by education from a woman of the world, or by unconscious imitation of such; and Maria Huxtable had not. Laura seldom looked at you, except so far as was necessary to fix your image on her retina for the purpose of recognition, until you spoke to her; then she could look straight enough at you. Maria Huxtable used actually to lorgner you and, what is more, every one else, to that excruciating degree that you were forced to speak to her. At a lawn-party there would be half-a-dozen young country gentlemen round Maria Huxtable, leaning on their mallets, and neglecting their game, only on account of those eyes; while Laura, in solitary imperial state, would be standing alone, waiting until it should please them to go on.

Noticeable to Maria the good-natured was this: that the moment a field-officer, or naval man of any mark, or dandy lawyer on circuit, or any man who, as those benighted savages down there would say, had "been in London," appeared, they made up to Laura immediately, and got amazingly intimate with her. On the other hand, Maria was very much amused by noticing that six young Oxford Christchurch men, down in these parts on a reading-party, used at these croquet rabbles to sneak past Laura with all the grace and self-possession which young Englishmen usually display on similar occasions. The two were tenderly devoted to one another, and their affection was of the most ostentatious kind, far surpassing any demonstrations ever made towards such unimportant people as lovers. Previous to any temporary separation they used to spend every precious hour with one another; during it they corresponded constantly, and were frantically, feverishly eager to rejoin one another at the first possible moment. Now a permanent separation was coming on they spent most of their time together.

"I will come across to the Castle to-morrow, dearest Maria,"

said Laura one evening. "I will come in the morning; the tide will be low at ten, and James can push me across in the dinghy."

"My sweetest Laura," said Maria, "I shall be out all day."

"And where are you going then?" asked Laura, surprised at this sudden announcement.

"I do not know. I am at papa's orders for the day; that is all."

So it was arranged that Laura should stay at home on that day, but the fates ordained otherwise. The next morning a box arrived from London, containing a beautiful parting present for dear Maria. How nice it would be to go and put it on her table in her absence, or take the chance of catching her! She delayed till evening in the hope that Maria would come home, and then she went.

She called one of the gardeners, who followed her down over the sands, and put her across the little channel of the river which was left at low tide. Climbing a steep path, partly cut into steps, up the low red cliff, she soon came to the platform above and stood before the castle, in the castle grounds, with the great keep hanging dark aloft.

She paused for an instant, to look back across the river at the Court embosomed in trees, standing on its promontory among the yellow sea-sands, and to think how many happy hours she had spent with Maria under the shadow of this keep where she stood, all of which had come to an end for ever! The Castle would be closed to her when Sir Harry Poyntz came.

She let herself in by a postern, and passing through many long dark pleasant rooms, and meeting no one, began to climb the stairs towards the second storey of the keep, where Maria had romantically made her bower; her hand was on the door-handle, when she started and drew back, for she heard Hammersley's voice on the other side of the door.

There was no doubt of it; in another moment his question, put in an easy tone, to Mr. Huxtable apparently, was answered by that gentleman's voice.

She determined to satisfy her curiosity at once without further listening, and went in. The room took up the whole of that floor of the keep, and was furnished with only four narrow windows, calculated to avoid archery more than to give light—one on each side. She saw the old prospects through each of them, partly with her outward eye, and partly in her memory, at one glance round. On the north the purple moor; on the south the grey sea getting greyer, as night settled down; to the east the Court, on its terraces, and the wide sand all around, with the tide crawling up; and to the west the sunset, which threw the shadow of this

keep towards her home. And now between her and the sunset was another shadow, the shadow of a man who sat in the window, talking to Huxtable—of a man she had never seen, and yet who had been speaking with Hammersley's voice.

Mr. Huxtable hurriedly said, "Oh, here is Maria! Come in, my love; I will be back directly," and hurried past her without recognition or explanation. Laura saw that he had mistaken her for Maria, and was determined to satisfy her curiosity by a view of this man with the other man's voice. She therefore sat down in the half-darkness, and allowed good Mr. Huxtable to go blundering down the stone stairs in error.

The reader knows more than poor Laura did, and therefore can guess who this man was, left with her here in semi-darkness, and why his voice was so like Hammersley's. Laura was in deep curiosity. There was no mistake about the similarity of the voice, however; for when he spoke to her, she could hardly help starting, and stared keenly into the dusk to see what he was like, without success. He leaned against the western window, and entered into conversation with her.

"Much obliged to you, Miss Huxtable, for letting me come in here. I had an object. I never pay compliments, or I should say that I was sorry I was going to turn you out of this room, whereas I am glad."

Laura's voice was a wonderfully well-trained one. She was more careful than usual with it as she replied out of the gloom—

"I am not Miss Huxtable; I am only Miss Huxtable's friend."

"Has Miss Huxtable made friends with a lady, then? On what false pretences? My ear never deceives me, though my eyes are bad. I beg your pardon for my mistake."

Laura was somewhat indignant for her friend, and thought the compliment coarse, or would have thought so but for her education. But she knew in a moment, from the way in which he spoke, that she was speaking to what her mother and grandmother had taught her to call a gentleman. And she spoke accordingly, "refusing," as Colonel Hilton might have said, the subject of Laura Seckerton, and coming into action with her other wing somewhat spitefully, fancying somehow that this man was some led captain of Sir Harry Poyntz, instead of being the man himself, as of course it was. I have shown you how naughty she could be; on this occasion she was rather naughtier than usual—

"The Huxtables are by far the nicest people about here. The whole county will miss them. It will be a sad change from them to Sir Harry Poyntz!"

“What has he been doing, then?” said the man in the dark.

“Getting his estate right,” replied Laura; “more’s the pity; a dreadful crime in these parts, where no one wants him. From all accounts it will be an evil day for the poor when these good Huxtables go, and we have an exchange.”

“A very bad exchange, you think?”

“A very bad one indeed, I fear!”

“Then, you have heard no good of Sir Harry?”

“No good whatever.”

“Much harm?”

“Oh dear no, not the least. Have you ever seen the view out of these windows before?”

“Yes, I know it well,” said the man in the dark. “If I were Sir Harry Poyntz, I would take this room as my own. He was born in this room, you know. And I would sit here every day, summer and winter, and I would look north, south, east, and west, and I would say—‘Before I die, every acre, from the moor to the sea, from the promontory westward to the sands eastward, shall be mine.’ I would sit in this old robber-tower, and say to myself, ‘You are the first of your name for a thousand years who has been forced to lend your castle for a pittance to a Manchester radical, a man who would destroy your order. Make war against his order in return. They have fought for their trade. Buy until there is no room in the land, until the middle class hereabouts are your creatures. The little freeholders are dropping like rotten pears under free-trade. Pick them up, and make yourself a Peer.’”

Laura was amused and interested by this singular confidence from the unknown. She went about with him at once.

“Cursed be they that add house to house, and field to field! you know,” she said.

“Oh, I would risk the curse, if I could get the land; and so would you, and so would any of us. Let’s have none of that now, come!”

“Perhaps you are right,” she said; “but it would be an awkward thing for some of us—for us in particular—if Sir Harry Poyntz were wicked enough to do such a thing!”

“Sir Harry Poyntz is wicked enough to do anything,” he replied. “I am Sir Harry Poyntz, and so I ought to know.”

“Oh!” said Laura to herself. “Have I made your ears tingle for you, my gentleman?” and began trying to remember what she had said. Sir Harry thought he had “shut her up,” but he had done nothing of the kind. She was only longing to

look on what should be, by all accounts, the wickedest, meanest, most worthless face that ever troubled this unhappy earth. She sat in the dark, trying to picture it to herself—trying to anticipate the reality, with the same feeling which make men madly bet—not from avarice, but as a proof of sagacity—on some sporting event which will be decided in the next three minutes. She could see that he was tall, and she pictured him satanic: a dark melancholic man, with sloping eyebrows, wicked little eyes, and an upward curl at the corner of his mouth; the man she knew so well by Cruikshank's art; the swaggering fiendish cavalier who has come home from the Spanish main, and who is no less than the fiend himself; a man with a wicked leer for a woman, and a twopenny-halfpenny, who-are-you, Haymarket scowl for a man. As she looked at him in the darkness, this fanciful image grew on her imagination till it was nearly reflected on her retina.

Huxtable, coming in with a candle, upset all her fine theories. She saw, instead of her corsair, a bland, fat, flabby, lymphatic man, with a flat pale blue eye, with less depth in it than a wafer; who was too fat for his apparent age; a man who had apparently, by some mistake in Nature's cookery, been boiled instead of roasted; a man who would not even *grill* well, but would remain mere flabby meat, with a coating of brown. He was so utterly unlike what she had thought, that she forgot Hannah More and all that sort of thing, and burst out laughing. But the nasty, shallow, light-blue, dangerous eye was steadily on hers, with a look of power too; and she stopped laughing.

I think, if the reader will allow me, that I will leave to her or his imagination, to conceive good Huxtable's fuss when he came back with the candle, and found that he had left not Maria but Laura alone with Sir Harry Poyntz; and his explanations, and the grand kotooing, and bowing and scraping, the utter ignoring of all passages of arms in the dark, which went on after Laura and Sir Harry were introduced to one another, may be also omitted with advantage, in order to get on to what is more interesting.

CHAPTER XV.

BELOW, Laura was pounced upon by Maria, who to her surprise, late as it was, with a rising tide, insisted on coming home with

her. There was not the slightest possible danger in crossing the Wysclith at any time of night, so Laura let her come.

Laura called her a traitor and a storyteller for saying she was out when she was not, for the sake of preventing a meeting between her and Sir Harry Poyntz. Maria said she had only done exactly what her father had told her, and had fully believed that she *should* be out; that Sir Harry Poyntz had come one single day on business, and did not wish to be recognised.

But when they were alone on the Court side of the river, Maria changed the conversation, and became very serious.

“Laura, I want to ask a question, and I am frightened.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Your answer. What do you think of Sir Harry Poyntz?”

“Think of him? What I always have ever since I played with him as a child. And now I have seen him again, I must say that his face does not belie his character, but is the most false, mean, and cruel one I ever saw!”

Maria gave a little cry, and laid her hand on Laura’s mouth—

“Oh, Laura, Laura! No, no! For my sake, no!”

“What have you to do with the man? Why should I not say what I please about him?”

“Because I am going to marry him, I believe. Oh! do have mercy on me, and make the best of him.”

“Marry him! Where have you seen him?”

“In the North, many times.”

“Do you love him?”

“Yes—yes, of course! It’s a family arrangement, and he has been shamefully illused and misrepresented, and——”

“He has been nothing of the kind, Maria. You know you are ashamed of what you are doing, or you would have told me of it before. Sir Harry Poyntz is a thoroughly worthless person. Men wonder how it is that his name is kept on the books of his clubs—a man whom my father would never allow to darken his doors for one instant. You don’t love him, and you know you don’t. You have withheld your confidence from me in this manner, not in the most friendly way, and therefore I cannot tell at all what is urging you on to this most miserable folly. If it is that you think it a fine thing to be Lady Poyntz, and live at the Castle, I can assure you that you had ten thousand times better be plain Mrs. Hilton. And you could be Mrs. Hilton to-morrow; I know that as well as any one. I have taught him to hate me like poison. He don’t suit me, and I have let him see it most unmistakably. But Harry Poyntz—good heavens!”

The shoe pinched a little tight here, it seemed. Laura soon found what she had done with that tongue of hers. Poor Maria turned upon her immediately. That one name had roused her to anger; she turned on Laura, and Laura soon found, for the first time too, that Maria had naturally every whit as much determination and strength as she had herself, and that at a battle-royal she was her superior, using weapons which Laura had been taught to believe unchivalrous and unladylike.

At this point Maria Huxtable lost her temper.

“Better be Mrs. Hilton!” she said furiously. “I have no doubt you think that I had better take up with him, and marry the man you encouraged, until you determined to sell yourself to a titled booby. Laura, you have behaved more wickedly than I thought it possible. I loved that man, and if you had not come between us I know he would have loved me. Loved me! You hear what I say, and see if you can sleep after it. I love him now; and I am going to marry Sir Harry Poyntz, who is all that you say and perhaps more. What fiend made you mention him by name, and drive me mad! I could have gone on smiling, and lying, and pretending I didn’t hate you, if you had not brought his name up. Nay, I didn’t know I hated you before. You must make me know it, forsooth. You have stood between that man and me, and now, when Lord Hatterleigh comes forward, you coolly recommend the man to my attention, when it is too late for ever! Laura, you have made an enemy of me, and you will live to wish you were dead before you had done so.”

All this was so horribly, ridiculously untrue, that if poor Laura had kept her temper she might have cleared the cobwebs from the poor girl’s eyes, and saved infinite woe. She was angry herself, however; and one angry woman going about with another is as vinegar poured upon nitre. She lost her temper now: she turned on the poor girl and said—

“What you have been saying about me is so very impertinent, and so ridiculously false, that I shall not condescend to any explanation whatever. You have often taken my advice; this is the last time I shall ever offer it, and it is this—that you cross the river, go to your bedroom, and pray to God to forgive you your wickedness.” And since tall talk inexorably leads to taller, and since if you begin talking big you will say a deal more than you mean, she continued: “I have done with you. You told me a lie to-day, in saying that you were out. I thought till now it was the first; now I see it is the last of many—the very last. Go back across the river to your fate. You have made your bed,

and must lie on it. Your servant is waiting for you at the steps."

And so they parted. Laura was only in time to dress for dinner, and very soon sailed into the drawing-room, looking very beautiful, only a little tired, as her mother and grandmother, two of the wise women of Gotham, could not help remarking.

Lord Hatterleigh was there, got up carefully, with a twice-round white tie, looking as if he was at the meeting of a Young Men's Christian Association, and was only waiting for the chairman's summons to rise and make the speech of the evening. He looked at her in what he considered an amatory sort of way, and tumbled over a footstool, and kicked her father, before he bowed himself stern-foremost into Lady Emily's stand of camellias. There was also Colonel Hilton, who was dressed like a box-keeper, and might have passed for one—only that his clothes were so perfectly cut, his beard (the Duke of Cambridge not having published his order) was so very long, and his Victoria Cross was peeping out on the left side of his whiskers. There was Papa, tall, grey, elegant—in blue and brass buttons; there was Mamma, stout and respectable, yet with twopennyworth of *espèglerie* to carry it off; there was Grandma, with her waxen complexion, and her lace cap, looking as if she was sitting there until the angels Respectability and Routine came and carried her to heaven, to join Hannah More; and here, in the midst of them, stood Laura herself, with a secret gnawing at her heart, which to her was guilty and dreadful. She loved the gallant young Hammersley, and she *knew* it. Though she said to herself loudly that it was a monstrous falsehood, yet she knew it to be true.

Lord Hatterleigh twaddled on about the Whigs, that incomprehensible and undefinable body, who form the staple of all political talk and speculation. Her father dexterously helped the turbot, and turned his graceful highbred head and face towards the Vicar, now and then making a little mild fun with him about the rest of his dinner—this being a Friday, and the Vicar being a ferocious high-churchman. That *preux chevalier*, Colonel Hilton, flirted solemnly and gracefully with Constance Downes. Sir Peckwich Downes beamed over his white waistcoat at his fish. Mamma and Grandma chirruped and cackled away as usual. Richardson the butler, master of the feast, administered stimulants according to his will and pleasure, getting vexed with Sir Peckwich's perpetual growl of "Sherry!" as showing want of confidence. There were their own three footmen in crimson plush, and Sir Peckwich's man in orange plush. Was there ever a more respectable gathering?

Poor Laura was excited and upset this evening. It came into her head: "What if she should rise up and tell them all the truth, that she was——?" She couldn't say it, not to herself; she could not articulate it even to her second consciousness, though she knew it was there, fatally sure enough, in her third and innermost soul. Suppose she was to get up and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am in love with ——." That way lies madness. What would Lord Hatterleigh do?—The Fox-and-North coalition was nothing to this. Would her father rise and curse her? Would Colonel Hilton's look of distrust develop into a look of contempt, and how? The footmen would "tehee," to borrow an expression from Mr. Carlyle. As for her mother and grandma, she knew what they would do—order her to her room. What Sir Peckwich Downes would do she couldn't think: whether he would have a fit, or order his carriage, or lose his temper, or get tipsy, she could not settle. But she found herself smiling over that little speculation, and was surprised to find that her smile swelled into a laugh, so loud that every one asked her what the joke might be, but she would not tell them.

So they sat over their meat and drink, as though there were no tragedy in the world, and never had been: as if, because you buried an ugly thing and didn't talk about it, that there were to be no more ugly things for ever: as if the butler's cousin had not been hung for sheep stealing; as if one of the footmen's sisters had not thrown her baby down a well; as if Sir Peckwich's brother had not fled to happier and more easy-going climes; as if the golden lock of hair which Colonel Hilton wore round his neck were not his sister's, red with the blood of the Khyber Pass! And quite right too.

"And what had she done?" she asked herself in scorn. "The man was a gentleman; there was no one in the room who could compare with him, except Hilton. What had made him commit this fatal folly, put on this degrading masquerade? And yet, if he had not, she could never have seen him." She rebelled against the notion that her love for him was disgraceful one moment, and then the next she denied that it existed; but she sat silent, and let them tattle on.

CHAPTER XVI.

Poor Maria Huxtable! Prowling among the desolate and empty flower-beds, lurking behind the shrubs, she got glimpses of the party through the half-drawn blinds. The man she loved was there, gay and cheerful, little dreaming who was watching him; and the woman who could have saved her, had she been more patient, was beside him, laughing and talking loudly and almost boisterously. "Laura has a bad heart," thought Maria; "can she laugh so soon after my story?"—Alas, yes! she has her own story too, Maria.—"And yet I loved that woman once." And so she delayed there in the growing darkness, tormenting her poor heart by looking into the house she never would enter again as a friend, and watching eagerly the man she loved so dearly, to think of whom was a crime. At last she turned to go towards her home and her fate. The servant who had rowed them over was asleep in the boat before she came back; behind her, as she crossed, the wood and the low long façade of the Court were bathed in the dim dull light of a young moon: but before, the cruel keep of her future home rose black and ominous, with the blurred crescent behind its topmost battlement, and the wooded cliff so dark that you could scarcely tell when the boat touched the shore.

Dinner would not be till half-past eight. There was time before her yet—precious time! Before she went to bed that night her fate would be sealed. She knew that if she said yes, she could never unsay it; she felt terribly sure of that. All that Laura had said of Sir Harry was true; yet wealth and title were great things. The wish not to leave her dear old home, where her sunny life had been passed, and anger against Laura and pique against Colonel Hilton were terrible assistants, and there was none by to help her. The hour of grace went by; and as she swept into the drawing-room, covered with jewels and lace, her father saw that she was dressed for attraction, and that the deed was done.

It was done indeed. These three were alone in the house, and when Sir Harry and Mr. Huxtable rose from their wine, the host gave Sir Harry ten minutes' grace. At the end of that time, coming into the drawing-room, he found Maria sitting calmly on one side of the fire, while Sir Harry warmed his knees, and examined his face in the pier-glass. As Huxtable entered he turned—

"I have been asking Maria not to leave the Castle with you,

but to remain as its mistress. She has said 'yes.' She has had the matter put before her in the most favourable manner by you, and has, I doubt not, heard every word that those two cackling old idiots Lady Emily Seckerton and Lady Southmolton, not to mention Miss Laura, have had to say against me. She has had the good sense to say 'yes.'"

Dare a man's eye follow the unhappy girl to her room that night—dare a man's hand, and no light one, write what she felt and what she said! Not mine. But she knew full well what she had done; and there was no shadow of turning with her.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARIA departed next day to visit an aunt; and Sir Harry Poyntz, keeping in strict seclusion, stayed over another day to see after some business.

Immediately after lunch that next day, Mr. Huxtable got into his phaeton and drove round, announcing his daughter's engagement to the master of the Castle.

He drove all the short afternoon, from one country-house to another, generally finding some members of the family at home at each house. As he drove he looked more aged, and more worn as he left each neighbour's. These old-fashioned country-folks none of them concealed their opinion about the matter. From house to house up the left bank of the Wyslith, they (some member of each family at all events) let him know their opinion of the business unmistakably. Generally the announcement was received with astonished silence; but some few spoke. Among the latter was Sir Peckwich Downes, who spoke to the purpose—

"I am very sorry to lose sight of my dear little sweetheart Maria; but you see of course, Huxtable, that it is impossible for me to know anything of her husband, or to exchange any more courtesy with him beyond a bow when we meet on the bench."

"He has been wild," said poor Huxtable.

"I never heard of *that*," said Sir Peckwich. "I was wild. I may have fought one Simon Stockfish, a fruiterer, behind Gray's Inn. My eldest son was very unsteady before he married—so unsteady, that I used to go away from home when he proposed a visit, and left him to the care of his mother and sisters. They brought him right, and he is as good a son as ever stepped since he married. But this—this 'man.'"

“He may reform, too,” said Huxtable.

“Huxtable! how can you look me in the face and talk like that? Who in the name of confusion has induced you to consent to this shameful arrangement? I can only tell you one thing: if this affair comes off, which I can hardly believe possible, I must take the same measure with you as I did with my son—be out whenever you call.”

There was nothing more to be said. They neither spoke again. The next house was the Vicarage—the next person the Vicar.

It happened to be the vigil of St. Thomas of Moorstanton (a saint whom the Vicar had evolved, it was said, out of his own internal consciousness originally, but whom the Vicar had “developed,” in spite of three or four sarcastic letters from the Bishop of Exeter), whose body had been brought and buried here at Wysclith, in spite of the strenuous opposition of five hundred thousand ass panier loads of small devils. So the Vicar had got out the school-children, and was doing a wonderful service over the grave of the saint in whom no one ever believed but himself, in the churchyard. Consequently poor Huxtable was received by the Vicar, a childless and submissive lady of fifty, who wore scarlet gloves, in deference to her husband’s orders.

Huxtable had been so very much bullied to-day that he was very humble here. Even to this woman, the fool of the neighbourhood—who had brought the Vicar money, and who never had a say in her own house—who followed blindly all her husband’s vagaries, while the sounder heads of his party cried out against him for ruining their cause with his folly: even before this woman (the “Umbrella,” as Laura had christened her) he was humble to-day. He broke the news to her apologetically; and as he did so, she by degrees took off her scarlet gloves.

“And now, my dear madam,” he said, “what is your opinion?”

“My opinion,” said the “Umbrella,” “most decidedly is that you haven’t got the feelings of a man about you. If that dear girl’s blessed mother had been alive, you never would have the impudence to propose such a thing.”

If one of his own Leicester lambs had, after this, ran at him barking, and bitten him in the calf of his leg, he could not have been surprised. If a mere umbrella of a woman like this gave him such a reception, what could be expected of her husband, coming fresh, in a state of supramundane pietism, in a green chasuble, from the tomb of a saint? Huxtable fled without confronting the Vicar; and as he took the reins, and set the horses’ heads towards the Court, said aloud—

“Let us have it over at once; let us get through with it.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the groom beside him.

“Let us have a finish and end of it; I’ll stand no more of this after to-day.”

The young groom’s conscience was troubled somehow, for he said—

“It was all along of the Court servants, sir. And we was in afore twelve after all.”

Huxtable laughed, but his laugh did him no good. He felt like a beaten dog in this matter. Every one had turned against him, and why? If this Sir Harry Poyntz was outside the pale of all society, why had no one ever told him of it? Most certainly no one ever had. His twenty-one years’ lease of the Castle was nearly up, and he had, during that time, heard nothing more against Sir Harry Poyntz than he had heard against the eldest young Downes, or against half-a-dozen others; and yet, now it came to the pinch, the county, which had submitted to his coming back there, who had talked of the Poyntz as of themselves, burst out on him in furious rage, at the first mention of his marrying an honest man’s daughter! Are class prejudices so strong that they would keep a secret like this from him? And now he had to face the Court, Lady Southmolton and Lady Emily, who gave laws hereabouts, and announce it to them. But he would go through with it. He was an honest Manchester man, and would know the truth. He would not have half-statements from Lady Southmolton.

“I shall get the truth *there*,” he said to himself, with that noble instinct which makes honesty recognise honest folks. And so he would have—but—

As he came thundering along in his mail-phaeton through the park, he turned round the corner of a plantation, and caught sight of a group before him.

Laura was riding side by side with a very gallant-looking young fellow in a black coat, but otherwise dressed as a foxhunter, who was leading a horse; and they were almost alone, talking together in an animated manner. A hundred yards ahead rode Sir Charles on “The Elk,” looking every inch the perfect gentleman and gallant horseman that he was. His long but perfectly-shaped and beautifully-clothed legs seemed made to clip that vast mass of horseflesh, and his upright not too broad back moved gracefully, under the perfectly-cut red coat, with every movement of the horse. A gallant gentleman, yet his close-cropped grey head was rather bent down to-day, and he seemed tired with his hunting.

As the phaeton bore down on them, the talkers parted and rode

aside on to the turf. He saw both their faces; Laura's was animated and interested. He looked at the dandy in the black coat, and to his unutterable amazement beheld *Hammersley*, and he was *laughing*. He was very much astonished; but Laura was, in her high-and-mighty way, very familiar with servants and dogs, he thought: still this was going rather far.

"Does this young man hunt in black?" he asked his groom.

"Yes, sir. He says every one wears pink now. He would not hunt in a frock at first, and now he has given up red altogether."

"Does Sir Charles allow these airs?"

"Allow, sir! He orders Sir Charles about everywhere, and he only laughs."

But it soon went out of his head; for Sir Charles stopped and waited for him, and trotted along with him gaily when he came up, telling him of the run, some part of which, as a matter of course, was one of the finest things ever seen. When they got to the front-door, and had dismounted, Sir Charles said, of course, "Come in, my dear Huxtable."

Huxtable said, "No, come into the pleasure with me;" and Sir Charles went, seeing that Huxtable had something to say; and they walked up and down along the terrace, not six hundred yards from the great keep across the river. It never occurred to either of them that Sir Harry Poyntz was watching them through a field-glass, but he was.

"Seckerton, our intercourse has been a very pleasant one for twenty years."

Sir Charles' hand was on his shoulder in a moment; he needed to say nothing.

"I fear your hand will be moved directly, Seckerton; I fear this will be our last interview. I have got it over with Sir Peck-wich Downes, and have gone out of his house without waiting to be ordered out. I have given my consent to Maria's marriage with Sir Harry Poyntz."

Sir Charles' hand was withdrawn indeed; he put both his hands suddenly to his head, and cried out, "Oh, good heavens!"

"It is quite true," said Huxtable, delighting in his own torture in a strange kind of way, "and the match is principally of my seeking. He is desperately in love with her—sixty thousand pounds; and I have put before her forcibly, as a man of the world, and a prudent and affectionate father, the rank, prestige, and title which she will gain by such a match. I have done everything to forward it in every way. I have got my will, and I wish we were both dead, dead, dead, lying quietly asleep beside her mother in the cemetery at Manchester."

“It would be much better,” said Sir Charles, quietly. And Huxtable, turning, saw that he was scared and shocked. He grew frightened himself now, and waited for Sir Charles to go on.

“This has come on me rather suddenly. Are you aware of the character Sir Harry bears in the county?”

“Something between Judas Iscariot and Beelzebub, apparently,” said Huxtable, “though no one has had the friendliness to give me any details until it is too late.”

“It is not too late now, is it? Surely not; your daughter would listen to you?”

“Not now. I know Maria better than you. And there is something the matter about some one else; and there’s a good deal of spite in the business, that is the truth. And it is too late; Maria won’t go back now.”

“But he, my dear sir—he?”

“He give up sixty thousand pounds!” laughed Huxtable; “he’d sooner prosecute her for breach!”

“But remove the sixty thousand; cut her off with a penny; disin——” and there he stopped like a bullet on the target.

Huxtable began slowly: “There seems to be something that no one dares tell me. And I’d sooner do that than——. What is it? Is it friendly or manly in you, Sir Charles, to keep me in the dark on such a subject? Come!”

Sir Charles remained as dumb as a stone for a minute; his thin brown handsome face seemed pinched up, as though with a spasm. At last he said—

“I am taken by surprise. Will you go away now, and come to me again to-morrow morning? And will you be assured of one thing: that I believe that you have acted in the dark about this matter, and that nothing shall ever alter the relations between us? Stick by me, Huxtable, and I will stick by you through everything.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT night, after dinner, Sir Charles, with his wife, and mother, and Laura, were together in the drawing-room. Sir Charles, standing with his back to the fire, and looking steadily over the tops of the women’s heads at a Raeburn of himself sitting on his mother’s shoulder, told them about Maria Huxtable’s engagement.

Laura was not surprised, of course; Lady Emily bounced—

yes, indeed, bounced—off her chair in an acute attack of virtuous indignation; while Lady Southmolton only took off her spectacles, laid down her work, and began rubbing her two waxen withered old hands one over the other.

What Lady Emily said was much the same as what every one else had said, and so the reader may guess at it. Sir Charles had expected her outbreak, but was more anxious to hear what her mother would say. It was some time before he heard it, for his wife took a long time running down. When she had subsided into a state of occasional indignant interjections, her mother-in-law began, in a style which gave Sir Charles great surprise. That she always made the best of things with the most wonderful tact, and an amount of Christian charity he had never seen elsewhere, he was perfectly aware; but he was not prepared for the way in which the old lady, in her optimism, supplied him with the very arguments he was dying to find for himself—

“Maria might have married any one,” she said: “and I think myself, not that it is any business of ours in any way whatever, that she is throwing herself away. Still, we must remember that Harry Poyntz has been much steadier lately—nay, seems to be growing into a model young man altogether. He had a bad start in life. His morals were corrupted by the example of his father, and his estate dipped, I thought beyond all hope, by his father’s and latterly by his brother’s extravagance. He has brought the estate right, or nearly so, and is going to put it right entirely by a most prudent match with a most estimable girl. I have every wish for their happiness. And I should say—you know how used I am to giving advice, my dears, and you must forgive me—that our duty is not to stand in the way, by any means whatever, of the repentance and the reception into a higher atmosphere of a misguided and unfortunate young man, who seems to be trying to retrieve himself, financially and morally.”

They heard a measured beat of oars, coming across the river towards the Court.

Lady Emily, as she heard her mother’s infallible saintlike voice putting the case in this form, grew awestruck, and began to get thoroughly ashamed of her late outbreak. Sir Charles was very uneasy, but allowed that the old lady had put it marvellously well. But Laura—the gentle, highly-trained, perfectly-formed, submissive Laura—rose suddenly up in flat furious rebellion, and frightened them all three (though they were too cunning to show it) out of their wits.

“I say,” she burst out, “that is a wicked and shameful business from beginning to end, and I’ll stop it! Grandma, how can

you use your tact to find excuses? No, ma, I am not in the schoolroom! Father, you seem tame and acquiescent over the matter; am I to distrust *you*? But if we talk about it any more we shall quarrel, for the first time in our lives; and I can only say one thing, that it can't be and sha'n't be, and that I'll stop it! Colonel Hilton's little finger is worth Sir Harry's whole body, and I will put things right, and put a stop to it."

If she had been an older campaigner, after having charged the enemy, she would have held the ground won, and waited for her supports, which were close at hand, for her mother was rallying and forming fast. Instead of this she committed the error of retiring, being contented with the astonishment inflicted, leaving the enemy only temporarily paralysed—in other words, flounced out of the room, and gave them time to reform.

Not in the most dignified fashion though, for she came full-tilt against a footman, unobserved by the whole party, who was holding the door open; and having nearly knocked him down, found herself immediately after cast against a fierce and severe-looking gentleman, in evening dress, with two orders on his coat; who on seeing her bowed a great deal too low, leered a great deal too much, backed against a table like dear Lord Hatterleigh himself, and in dashing to hold the next door open for her, trod on her gown, and tore it out of the gathers. She gave him that particular woman's bow which means, "There is some one in the neighbourhood somewhere," and wrathfully disappeared.

Before the capsized footman was discovered by the three left behind, Lady Southmolton had looked across her son-in-law to her daughter, and said quietly—

"This is your foxhunting; this is your galloping about alone at all hours." The grievance was ten years old, and had not been turned up before. The retort was not less precious to the old lady for that.

"Captain Southcot, sir, wishes to speak to you in the ante-room."

"And who on earth is Captain Southcot? And what on earth prevents Captain Southcot from coming at a decent hour in the day?" snapped our poor irritated Sir Charles in a loud voice, and at the same moment caught sight of that gentleman standing within ten feet of him, and recognised him—one of the very men in this world he was least anxious to offend. He was very much taken aback, but perfectly up to the emergency. He burst out into a laugh, and advanced towards Captain Southcot with his hand extended, repeating—

"And who on earth is Captain Southcot? And why the deuce

has he dared to come into the neighbourhood without knocking his father's old friend up before this?"

Poor Sir Charles! Baden would be better than this sort of thing—to be driven to lying for the first time in a life, and old age fast creeping on. He felt this—it came on him like a shock; he tried to sustain the effort, but it was too much for him; he began to get forgetful, and talk nonsense.

With the greatest *empressement* he had Captain Southcot in, and introduced him. The two ladies saw in one moment that he was what our late lamented friend Major Pendennis would have called a "tiger." He was a man with a complexion, a nose, and a moustache which didn't cover his teeth. He had eyes, too, somewhere, arguing by analogy, or he couldn't have got there without a dog or a boy; but if any one had told you so, you would almost have felt inclined to deny it. His face was too small and too short, and his hair was parted in the middle—the sort of man one has a morbid desire to contradict flatly, if not to go further.

"Your father was an old friend of mine at school," said Sir Charles, "and I remember your mother, Lady Joanna Southcot well."

"Lady Mary Southcot," said the captain, grinning.

"Lady Mary, of course: what am I thinking of? Poor dear Joanna Southcot! I ought to remember her, too, well enough; she was your aunt."

Lady Emily rapped the table two or three times, and said, impatiently, "My dear Charles, you are wool-gathering!"

Conversation is generally hopeless when three people are wondering what on earth the fourth one has come for; but it was more hopeless still after Sir Charles's dreadful blunder. It had not become quite monosyllabic, when Lady Southmolton came to their assistance by making preparations for bed, by moving from the chair she occupied all day to the bed she occupied all night—a transition which had something of solemnity in it to these good devoted people; for she was so feeble now, that none of them knew but that the next morning the chair might be empty.

As soon as her work was put in the bag, and her little books of devotion which lay around her all day were gathered up, and she had gone away on her daughter's arm, Sir Charles shut the door behind them, and turning round on Captain Southcot, said quietly—

"Now, sir?"

He looked so big, so grand, and so melancholy, as he looked down on the miserable little ape before him, that that gentleman was abashed, and only handed him a note. For the fulfilment of

the rest of his commission, to report how Sir Charles looked on reading it, he had recourse to his imagination, and lied horribly, but so clumsily that he got himself sworn at.

Sir Charles read the note carefully, folded it up again, put it in his waistcoat-pocket, and began staring at Captain Southcot with his great hazel eyes, which looked awfully prominent under his grey eyebrows. After an interval, longer than was quite polite, he said—

“Do you know the contents of this letter?”

“Yes.”

“And now won't you take something before you go?”

“Nothing at all, thank you.”

“Quite sure?”

“Quite sure.”

“Will nothing tempt you?” said Sir Charles, ringing the bell: “Sherry and seltzer, brandy and soda-water, noyveau and lemonade?”

“Nothing, thank you,” said Captain Southcot, who didn't like the look of the old gentleman, and was bowing himself out. “There is no answer to the letter, then?”

“None whatever. You may tell your master not to send you here again if you like. But are you quite sure you won't take anything? It is to be had in one moment: gingerbeer and bitters, brimstone and treacle—anything! They are going to supper in the servants'-hall; won't you join them? Good-night. Don't let me catch you here again.”

CHAPTER XIX.

Poor Sir Charles was in very sad trouble indeed—in a fearful dilemma; but he would not face it out, and took the consequences. It becomes necessary to see what these troubles arose from, and how they had accumulated.

About the best way for a gentleman of easy disposition with four thousand a year to ruin himself, is for him to take the hounds and keep open house. If these two things will not do it, let him farm five or six hundred acres of his own land; if that does not finish him he must have the most astonishing good fortune. Now Sir Charles had done all these three things, and his fortune had been bad.

When Sir William Poyntz died, and his son, the present baronet, declined to keep the hounds on, Sir Charles "nobly came forward," as the county paper had it, and offered to take them if the county would give him a thousand a-year. An enthusiastic meeting of the hunt and the farmers was called, who voted that sum by acclamation, and, what is more, paid it—for the first year; after that, the subscriptions had got rapidly less and less, so that, for the last ten years, Sir Charles had had little to depend on beyond the regularly-paid fifty guineas of Sir Peckwich Downes, and his own pocket.

He had everything perfectly though not extravagantly done; and he found that the hounds cost him just about £2,000 a year. Devonshire is a cheap county, and Lady Emily was a most thrifty and excellent manager, so she managed to keep house with £4,000 a year, whereas Lady Downes could not do nearly as much for five; put another thousand on for sundries, and you will get a very pretty yearly deficit, which had been going on for twelve years. But this was not the worst. Sir Charles could calculate all this; but he never knew, never could dare to think, even to this day, what he lost upon the home-farm. I have known £30,000 lost on 1,200 acres, and the muddle in that case was certainly not worse than in that of the home-farm at Leighton Court. He may have lost anything. Meanwhile he had not been over-anxious, for the whole of the Shropshire property came to him at the death of Miss Seckerton of Brignal, who, however, was only six-and-forty.

Of course his estate was deeply mortgaged, but no one knew of it, and many would not have believed it. Sir Charles had such a character in the neighbourhood for foresight and prudence, that he was resorted to for advice by all his neighbours, on subjects varying from the choosing of a gun to the marrying of a daughter; and, indeed, he deserved this confidence, for a clearer head for other folks' business never was on human shoulders. It would have been an inexpressibly sad thing for Sir Charles to have confessed himself a poor and unthrifty man before these simple people; but a greater evil than that had threatened him for this year past, and had made him wish sometimes that he could say, once for all, "Neighbours, I have been deceiving you all; I am but the most foolish and the poorest among you. I only ask to die with your faces around me." He thought that he would retrench and get his estate right before the Shropshire money fell in, but he began to think so when it was too late!

His man of business had come to him one day, and informed him that he had discovered that every mortgage on the estate was in the hands of Sir Harry Poyntz. When Sir Charles, aghast, asked how he had discovered it, he replied that that was the strangest

part of the business ; that Sir Harry Poyntz, whom he had never spoken to, had stopped him in the street and informed of the fact in a very few words, had then laughed and ridden off.

From that day Sir Charles's head had begun to bow. Nearly a year had passed, and Sir Harry Poyntz made no sign. The latter had improved his acquaintance with his tenant Mr. Huxtable and his charming daughter in the North, and had clinched that matter by coming down to the Castle and proposing to Maria. Until the day after that, no communication had passed between him and Sir Charles. But he had watched Huxtable and him through a glass, and had noticed the attitude of disgust and horror with which Sir Charles received the intelligence, and he saw that he must act.

That evening he sent across his toady, henchman, or what you call that sort of man, a particularly worthless young fellow, with the note of which we have seen the arrival and reception.

There was no actual threat in it. He merely pointed out Sir Charles's great influence over Huxtable, and that if it was used to prevent his marriage with Maria, he (Sir Harry) would miss sixty thousand pounds, for which he should indemnify himself (so he said) if his own father stood in the way.

That was all, and enough too for poor Sir Charles ! Forced as it were to lie—he who had always been so acutely proud of his honour and straightforwardness, to be driven to this !

Laura, coming in late into his dressing-room, found him with his head buried in his hands, and the letter lying before him. She came in softly. She was accustomed to coming in softly on these occasions, and to passing a few golden happy minutes in loving talk with the man she loved best in the world. There was once perfect confidence between those two ; their hearts had been so drawn, as it were, to one another, that their friendship had become greater than that between two men who had tried and who trusted one another—greater than the mere instinctive love of father and daughter.

But all this was past. One thing Sir Charles had unhappily concealed from his daughter—his difficulties. One thing Laura would fain have concealed even from herself, but could not. Something had disturbed their confidence, and each thought they were the guilty one.

As she came behind him to-night, she saw the letter lying open before him, and, before she knew what she was doing, she had read, "Yours very truly, Harry Poyntz." The look of wonder was still on her face when he turned, and saw that she had read it. He angrily crumpled it up in his hand and turned towards her.

“Laura,” he said, coldly, “I see by your eyes that you have read the signature of this letter.”

“Accidentally.”

“Of course I mean accidentally, my love! Laura, when you left the room this evening you said that you could and would put a stop to the match between him (touching the letter) and poor Maria.”

“I did, and I will.”

“Now, my child, I charge you, on your duty, to remain absolutely neutral in the matter.”

“Oh, father—father!”

“Absolutely neutral! It is not your business to interfere in any way. Older and wiser heads than yours are at work upon it.”

“You surely are not going to let it take place?”

“You talk like a perfect child. In the first place, I have not decided what course to pursue; and in the second, what right have I to dictate to Huxtable who his daughter may or may not marry? I meanwhile insist that the influence of this family shall be used through me, and through me only.”

Poor Laura saw that her father was sold to the enemy, but would not acknowledge it to himself. She was too sick at heart to say anything more. For the first time he had spoken harshly to her. She would wait for better times; she turned away and left him.

When Mr. Huxtable called at eleven o'clock the next day, he was shown into the breakfast-room, where he found only Sir Charles and Lady Southmolton, who had evidently waited there for him, before taking up her usual seat by the little drawing-room fire. Sir Charles merely gave him “good morning”: he left Lady Southmolton to speak.

She soon began. “We heard a piece of news last night,” she said, “and it is my turn to congratulate you on it. The more I have thought of this match between your daughter and Sir Harry Poyntz, the better I think of it. It is an eminently good match; he has family, a large and increasing fortune, youth, and health. He is not worthy of her—no man is, you say—but she would wait a long time before she did better. Sir Harry might marry nearly any one he chose in London. It is a good match.”

And so she honestly believed. She had been so very much used to see very happy marriages made on mere worldly grounds, that she had got to regard the thing rather as a matter of course. She would not have thought that she was doing her duty had she stood between Maria and such a match—so she spoke as above.

Her word was law to Mr. Huxtable, and the thing was done : Sir Charles sitting by silent, and trying to believe that what his mother-in-law said was true, but not in the least degree succeeding.

CHAPTER XX.

THIS year, on Christmas Eve, the gout, which had for some years been twitching at the long fingers and tugging at the small well-formed feet of long Jim Pollifex of Longworthy, flew to his stomach in a kind of pet, killed him, and went off to seek another victim.

“He was a great loss to the county,” said the bucolic interest ; “a great loss to county society,” said every one who had ever been in it ; “a great loss to the bucolic interest,” said both Tory and Whig. The Whigs determined on a fight for that division of the county, and spent £155 10s. 9d. on a patriotic address, setting forth the claims of Colonel Hilton.

Pollifex had been a somewhat remarkable man—a longer, leaner, shrewder, wittier edition of his younger brother and heir, Abiram, the great Australian statesman. He made his last joke to the doctor when he was told things were getting serious, and nominated Sir Peckwich Downes as his successor. The Liberals withdrew the instant his name appeared in print, and their £155 10s. 9d. worth of stationery was pelted with mud by children scarce out of arms. The Tories had played too big a card for them. Sir Peckwich Downes had done so much work for the Tories in Parliament before—was so very big, so very good, so very rich, so perfectly convinced of the infallibility of his opinions—such a model landlord, such a model husband, such a capital horseman, such a thoroughly kind-hearted gentleman, that the Liberals felt they could not play even such a card as Colonel Hilton, V.C., C.B., against him. They retired, and called Sir Peckwich Downes an ass, in which they were mistaken. There was no opposition.

So the Downes went off to London early in February, and Lady Downes gave herself such airs before she went, that our people were not very sorry when she was gone. She knew—every one knew—that Sir Peckwich’s peerage was certain, should the Tories come into power, as they were sure to do with this reaction going on ; and she took to patronising Lady Southmolton,

until that old lady furbished up her old arms, and did a little mild fighting. However, she was gone, and Hoxworthy was empty, and the servants gave a ball in the gallery.

It turned out also that the Liberal agent had been a little too quick in using Colonel Hilton's name. With a laudable effort to be first in the field, he had started that gentleman without any attempt at consultation with him or others. That gentleman, his enemies said, as soon as ever he saw that his chance was hopeless, resented the liberty which had been taken with his name, by writing a letter to the county paper, indignantly denying any complicity in the matter, and showing that he had, contemporaneously with the Liberal manifesto, accepted an official mission to Châlons.

It was perfectly true. He had been appointed by the Horse Guards to go and look at the great French camp, and he went away and out of the way. "What he ever came *in* the way for," said Lady Southmolton, "is a question which, with our limited knowledge of the ways of Providence, it will be impossible for us to solve on this side of the grave:" in saying which Lady Southmolton spoke too fast.

Lord Hatterleigh, with his hat on the very back of his head—with his respirator, umbrella, and goloshes, keeping both windows up all the way—had likewise departed for London, to attend to his Parliamentary duties. Maria Huxtable had gone the day after her quarrel with Laura, and had never come back. She and her father were in London, where they were joined, very soon after the beginning of the season, by Sir Harry Poyntz and innumerable north-country friends, while preparations for the wedding were going on most briskly. No one, in short, was left in the neighbourhood but our people and the Vicar, who, after a long wrangle with a dissenting granite-splitter on the moor, had wrought himself into a Torquemada vein and excommunicated him.

All else was very still and peaceful; and as the spring went on day after day, even the Vicar and the stone-splitter ceased to wrangle, and were out trout-fishing together before April was over. Nature felt spring in every vein. Even on the solitary mountain-top of Fern Tor quaint little plants came forth and sunned themselves; the great bog got himself a fringe of gold, and in the deep granite glen of the "hundred voices," down which Wyselith hurried night and day, his roar was dulled and softened by the over-arching bowers of greenery.

But down in the slate and red-sandstone country spring showed brightest. There the greens were more vivid, the shadows

deeper, the water in the streams clear as crystal, untinged by peat. The beautiful half-cultivated valleys, which stretched in all directions, deeply wooded, had each one a sleepy brook which murmured on from shallow to pool, crowned with new yellow shoots of king-fern and lady-fern, hazel and alder. Bright and rare butterflies and insects shot to and fro across the surface of the water, and trout, hardly less gaudy than the butterflies, poised themselves below in the crystal, above the pale-blue gravel. It was a beautiful season, a foolish romantic season; everywhere too was the jubilant flute-voice blackbird, filling the air with song.

As for Lady Emily and her mother, they had nothing whatever to trouble them, and were happy enough; but to Laura and her father, with their two wearying secrets, it was a season of rest which they were glad of. They both pursued the same plan, the foolish old plan we have all pursued in turn: making believe because our trouble does not make itself heard, that it is getting distant, while we know well all the time that it is creeping steadily nearer. They both succeeded pretty well, and were gay enough, riding together along the sands, or up aloft on the moor; but their old confidence in one another was gone, and they knew it.

Neither of them chose to know the exact day of Maria's marriage. No one ever talked of it except Lady Southmolton, who did so occasionally on principle, to show that a thing to which she had given her approval was of necessity a perfectly eligible subject of conversation: however, she did not know the day, and no one else cared to inquire. Sir Charles had heard so little about it that he began to hope it was all over and done. One day Laura followed him into his justice-room or study after breakfast, and said—

“I have heard from Constance Downes, father. She has been to the Queen's ball.”

“Oho! indeed!” said Sir Charles. “And is there any other news from the gay folks, eh?”

“Not much,” said Laura, looking out of window. “Lady Poyntz and her husband are at Ems.”

“Hem!” said Sir Charles. “And when—when did the ———?”

“Wedding take place? Last week.”

“There was no bell-ringing; why were the bells not rung?”

“The Vicar found the young men in the belfry getting ready, and he turned them all out, locked it up, and took the keys away. He said that if one of them liked to be locked in by himself he might toll, but that there should be no chiming.”

“The man is mad!”

“Quite mad!”

So it was all over. “And a good job too,” *said* (not *thought*) Sir Charles to himself. “They’ll be able to pay their way, which is a great thing in these times. She hasn’t done badly.” Alas! Alexander in debt and Alexander out of debt talk very differently.

At the end of July all the old set were back again, with the addition of the Poyntzes, who came back last of all. But before that a great deal that was very mischievous and sad had occurred, as we must show you. “It is very hard for idle hands to keep out of mischief,” says old Watts. Certainly Miss Laura, that opinionated and self-sufficient young lady, was exceedingly idle this spring; all the more solid of her new books from Exeter lay unread on the table; while she, as Edie Ochiltree would say, went “daundering” by burnsidies with “Maude” and “Aurora Leigh.” Idle she was, certainly, and contrived to get into a labyrinth of mischief such as is inconceivable by folks who try to fight against circumstances in any way, and do not altogether give up and believe that “the nice” is co-existent, conterminous, and scientifically identical with “the common-sensible.”

CHAPTER XXI.

LAURA had better, for some reasons, have been in pension in a third-class boarding-house at Boulogne, than have stayed “daundering” there in Devonshire that spring. Her father and she had lost confidence in one another. There was just one little matter—the Hammersley matter, to wit—which prevented her telling all things to the Vicar as heretofore: a mere twopenny-halfpenny little business, but one which she was afraid to tell him, and which, after all, was no earthly business of his. Her mother was—her mother—a perfectly commonplace woman; and as for her grandmother, good as she was, and sensible according to her lights, Laura had seen her little store of experience exhibited so often, that she, had she lived among betting people, might have kept herself in gloves, by betting on what her grandmother would say on any given subject. The only woman who seemed to have any originality in her whatever was old Elspie, her nurse, the most romantic and superstitious old trot in the three kingdoms.

And I must, sooner or later, come *en visage* with my reader about another matter. Let us get it over, and let the reader make the worst of it, or the best of it, as he chooses. Laura was thinking a great deal too much about this Hammersley—this incomprehensible young *preux chevalier*—a great deal too much.

It is hard to blame her much. Of course she was very indiscreet in ever thinking of him for a moment, but her father was more indiscreet still; knowing what he knew about the man's quasi-position, he should not have allowed her so much intercourse with this splendid Falconbridge. But debt and anxiety had clouded his mind; and, moreover, this young fellow was getting very dear to him. He had wished for a son, but had never had one. His daughter was not to him what she had been, and in this young man the old gentleman seemed to see the son of his imagination. Hammersley's continual affectionate attention to him was very pleasant; there was such grace about the young fellow that, even when Hammersley bullied him and ordered him about, he, on the whole, liked it, and did not rebel. It was so well and so kindly done, so well and so gently, that Sir Charles, who thought he had but few years' happiness before him, delighted in this young man's presence, and, forgetting the unhappy circumstances of his birth, treated him as an equal, contrasting him favourably with his half-brother, "Harry the Wicked," with his sallow ruthless face, and his cold blue eye; and Robert (now in India), whom he remembered a fierce, savage, but beautiful boy—a boy more disagreeable for the contrast of his wondrous beauty and his uncontrollable temper. "I am in the hands of Harry Poyntz," he used to think; "and if Harry dies before my ruin, I am in the hands of that young fiend Robert. I wish this fellow were other than he is. I could plead to *him*."

Not one word of what was passing did Laura's mother or grandmother know. They had not given Hammersley two thoughts since he had first come; and even if they had done so, the possibility of Laura's being indiscreet enough to interchange words with him never entered into their heads. But they noticed that Laura was always with her father now; that she had given up all her old orderly habits, and came and went like a wild sea-bird on the shore. All this gave her mother great uneasiness.

"I have lost all power over her. I dare not say anything to her. I wonder if she means to have Hatterleigh. This don't look much like it."

"My dear," said the elder lady, "in my opinion she has made up her mind to have him, and is enjoying her freedom before

going into harness. That is it, depend upon it. There is not a more sensible girl in England; she is far too wise to refuse such an establishment as Grimwood."

Lady Emily could only hope so. She knew Laura a great deal better than her mother. Many a furious outburst of childish temper had been concealed from the old lady, and remained a secret between mother and daughter. Laura could be headstrong when she chose, and she chose now.

Meanwhile she looked on herself as a model of discretion, and indeed never, first or last, did she take any step unworthy of a lady. She kept Hammersley carefully at bay, and very rarely spoke to him; on one or two occasions she had so far forgotten who he was as to enter into conversation with him, as when Huxtable overtook them in the park; at these times she found him to be, just what he looked, one of the most charming fellows she had ever met. Of course she saw he was a gentleman. She would have given a great deal to know his history, but her father and mother kept that (at least all they knew of it) to themselves.

Her father, during these months, was as restless and as reticent as herself. The passion almost the pursuit of his life had been horse-riding. Save that he had done his duty as landlord and magistrate, he had done nothing else. Now, with a prospect of Baden or Wiesbaden before him—now that he saw that it only rested with an utter scoundrel to ruin him, and to make him walk afoot till he was too old to ride—he took to his horses and his dogs more diligently than ever; his grooms and his dog-feeders acquired new importance in his eyes. The poor gentleman saw that his power over them was ephemeral—that the time would soon come when they would call him master no longer. He had always been a kind and indulgent master—now he grew kinder and more indulgent than ever. Anxiety acts on some souls like that. Poor Sir Charles knew that his reign was coming to an end, and wished that his subjects should have none but kindly recollections of the banished prince. Laura had got hold of a foolish negro song, "So Early in the Morning!" a very pretty little song too—

"Master's dead and gone to rest,
Of all the masters he was best."

She sang it once, but he asked her not to sing it again. He gave every reason but the right one; it was silly—the lilt was a mere vulgar jingle, and so on. Poor fellow! the truth was that the silly pretty song touched him too nearly.

Ah! poor fellow; if he would only have told the truth to Laura! He could not tell it to his wife or Lady Southmolton—he *dared* not! They, had they taken any pains to calculate matters, might have found it out for themselves; but no. Sometimes he asked himself, now and afterwards, did they ever guess or care to guess the truth? They certainly never gave any sign. The household, so utterly bankrupt, was kept up in the same respectable manner: prayers at nine—lunch at two; service in the hall on wet Sunday mornings—sermon every Sunday evening, wet or dry, in the dining-room at nine; the whole dead-and-alive old routine kept up as though there were no merciless creditor, as though ruin were not knocking at the door. It would have been better if he had told Laura first than last.

But he could not. The dark nameless secret in Laura's heart showed itself in her eyes, and Sir Charles saw that there was a cloud between them. He knew he had sinned, and sinned deeply, in the matter of Maria Huxtable; and he thought that the indecision in Laura's eye, the unwillingness with which she met his look arose from contempt—that she could not forgive him about that matter. He knew that he was guilty, but he never dreamt that she could have anything to conceal too. He was so unused to having anything to conceal, that now, when he had erred, and found himself, through circumstances, left without a friend, he got cowardly and reckless.

But though Sir Charles had no more confidence with his daughter, still he had *her*. Though his position was a fiction, an air-raised castle which might tumble down any moment, still he had Laura. She was his daughter, the beauty of Devon, the best horsewoman and the best-trained lady in the county. And she loved him still, in spite of this cloud between them. It would all vanish soon, into thin air; and after that the dreary hot white streets of Baden. Meanwhile he had his daughter, his dogs, his grooms, and his horses, and no one knew anything; he need not walk afoot and see other folks on horseback.

He was never out of the saddle now. He would ride as long as he could. As for Laura, she would ride you from cock-crow to curfew, and she rode with him, loving him as he loved her, while neither dared say the few words which would have restored confidence. In either case it would have been too terrible.

So these two reprobates went about on horseback—away before prayers, home too late for dinner—committing every sin of omission conceivable. The Vicar came down on Laura for missing church on Easter Eve, pathetically noticed her entire neglect of the Easter decorations, and plaintively rebuked her for her

backslidings. Laura gave a little laugh, which puzzled the Vicar, and promised amendment. After he was gone she laughed again, louder. How quaint his language seemed to her! His rebuke, earnest though it was, seemed taken out of some book; not a word in it seemed wrong. Yet all that had had a meaning for her three months ago. How far off seemed Christmas—how long she had lived since then! Was the rapt worshipper of Christmas the same being as the wild gipsy-like Laura of Easter? She laughed again; there was nothing irreverent or mocking in her laugh; it was merely a laugh of wonder, such as a savage gives when he sees a new toy.

But her riding habit was on, and her father was waiting for her in the stableyard.

CHAPTER XXII.

So Laura—still laughing, still vaguely puzzled about the change in herself, still vaguely wondering where it would lead—went into the stable-yard, with the skirts of her habit gathered in her hand. Her father had mounted “The Elk,” and was at the further end of the yard. Hammersley was leaning against his leg, and talking to him, with the bridle of his horse he was evidently going to ride, over his arm. Laura looked, and saw that the horse he had appropriated was the very horse she had ordered for herself. The grooms meanwhile were bringing out for her another horse, a horse she did not like particularly. She rebelled.

“I ordered Avoca,” she said. “I shall not go out to-day, on this horse.”

One of the grooms said that “Mr. Hammersley had countermanded the order, and had said that Miss was to ride the chestnut.”

And at the same moment Hammersley said to her father: “I want to ride that horse to-day. His mouth has been pulled about sadly lately; I want to ride him myself.”

This was going too far. Sir Charles was very angry. He said, in Hammersley’s hearing alone—

“You are taking liberties. I will allow no liberties. Do you think, because—because—that I will allow you to speak in that way? I know the secret of your birth, Hammersley, and I have treated you as if you were the first-born. But I will not stand this.”

"I am a fool," said Hammersley; and he went quietly forward, and told the grooms to change the saddles, without looking at Laura. They obeyed him in a moment; they knew who was practically master. When the arrangement was accomplished he went back to Sir Charles, without once offering to put Laura on her horse. One of the grooms did that.

Sir Charles and he had time for a minute's private conversation, away from the others. Sir Charles was still angry, but his anger was passing away. He said to Hammersley: "You forced me to speak to you. And there is another thing I wished to say. From your manner, you seem to assert an equality with us, which, under the circumstances, you are scarcely warranted in assuming. Do you know anything which others do not? Is there any chance of your assuming the place in the world to which you are fitted? If so, I will serve you with purse and with influence to the utmost of my power."

Hammersley pressed his hand. "Let it be as it is for the present." They had time to say no more.

To-day Sir Charles and his daughter were bent on an aimless expedition to the wildest and farthest of their farms, on the very moor itself—Fernworthy: a solitary stone house, in the centre of about eighty acres of poor arable land, reclaimed from the moor, lying at the edge of the great Wyselith bog, at the sources of the river, in the heart of the mountains. There were some puppies at walk there, and he made believe he wanted to see them, so as to get a day's riding with his daughter. By a similar kind of self-deception, he persuaded himself that his new favourite, Hammersley, had better come too and see them. The pad-groom was ordered back, and Hammersley followed.

So they rode away from the sound of the sea, through the deep red lanes, through the rich overarching boscage of the first band of country; and then through a long-drawn valley of yellow clay, through which the blue slate peeped here and there, among world-old oaks, thickly clustered, underlaid with holly—the home of the woodcock. Then, facing on to the culminating height of the slate hills, they rode across the desolate scratch-and-scramble-farmed, infanticide-producing twenty-acre freehold, ten-bushel country, which lies between the thirty-bushel civilisation of the red lands, and the vast barbarous granite desert beyond; lastly they came to the country of heather and bleating peewits—to the hot silence of the moor; Wyselith, five hundred feet below them, hungrily gnawing at the ribs of the earth to win his passage to the sea.

But as they rose to this height, great clouds—which un-

poetical folks call "cabbage-headed," but which more sentimental folks call either "blue piled thunder-loft," or else "Alp-formed cirro-cumuli"—kept rising also from the south-east, and now hovered so closely overhead that Sir Charles remarked, as if there were the least necessity for doing so, that they were going to have a thunderstorm.

Wyselith only makes one great bound or waterfall in his passage from the hills to the sea, and that is in his very youth, shortly after he leaves the bog, and before he gets into that great grey glen—the "glen of the hundred voices" as we have called it—which stills his roaring by degrees till he comes into the softer strata below. The ford across to Fernworthy crosses the infant stream about one hundred yards above the waterfall; and as they splashed through it, they saw the little trout scouring away in all directions over the yellow gravel, and heard the first thunder-crash over Fern Tor.

There is no *need* to describe Fernworthy, because we shall not want it again. Yet we will give three lines to a genuine moor-farm. A low grey stone house, with a wall enclosing what our Scotch brothers call "policies" (and why?); low granite hills, breaking sometimes into low weathered tors, blocking the horizon; a dozen ill-grown fir-trees, dogs which bark all day, and, for want of anything to do, hunt the cats (with a distinct understanding, however, on the part of the cats). Besides this, muck, mess, mad mismanagement, cider and brandy, immorality and ignorance: you must go to the backwoods to match some moor-farms.

The farmer, a vast, untidy, good-humoured, slab-sided giant, held the gate open for them. "You'm just in time, Sir Charles," he said. "Listen to mun; and how she stinketh! mussy."

The "she" referred to the air, which certainly deserved to be so spoken of, for a sulphureous electrical smell penetrated their nostrils most disagreeably. Hammersley took their horses to the stables, and he had hardly come into the kitchen when the rain began to roar upon the roof, and the first red blink of lightning was visible in the room.

It was a very fearful storm, such as the livers in the lowlands seldom remembered, but which were frequent enough, said the farmer, among the hills. Laura sat beside her father in the middle of the room, away from the chimney; and though she to a certain extent disliked the glare of the lightning, which was almost perpetual, she could not help looking at the window; for Hammersley stood there, looking coolly out into the livid blaze

perfectly unconcerned. At each variety in the lightning his face assumed a different colour—now green, now purple, now flushed with red; and as she watched, she began to fancy that his face was changing rapidly from one fierce passion to another with a grotesque diablerie exceedingly terrifying. At last, during a flash of lightning more white, brighter, and more prolonged than the rest, which was accompanied by three or four sharp snaps, and then a roar which shook the house, she saw his face take the colour and the rigidity of death.

Her nerve gave way, and she screamed out, "Oh, he's killed!" and sprang towards him. She had seized his arm before she was aware of it; and he turned very coolly towards her, saying, in his usual voice, looking very steadily at her—

"It was the effect of the lightning on my face, I dare say, Miss. I will come away from the window."

Laura felt a trifle silly at the exhibition of a self-possession greater than her own, and began wondering whether or no she hadn't made a fool of herself. She thought more of this question on finding that her father had suddenly tuned his fiddle up a full octave higher, and had become afflicted with a somewhat offensively polite silence. Laura was terribly frightened.

If her father's eyes had been for one moment opened, they were very soon shut again. I believe that in the terror of what happened instantly after, he forgot the little circumstance altogether, or, if not, that it dwindled into insignificance. The storm was soon over, and they rode away.

The ford before mentioned, where they had seen the trout scudding over the yellow quartz gravel, was now a whirling porter-coloured torrent of uncertain depth. Sir Charles pulled up at it. When they passed before they could hear the noise of the waters in the glen below; now every sound, even that of the thunder, which was still growling in the N.E., was swallowed up in the roar of the waterfall, which was a bare hundred yards to the right; he could see the water shelve away smooth and glassy and disappear, while from the chasm the spray rose and floated among the rocks, telling of the hell of waters below.

This was all uncommonly pretty. He had an eye for scenery, and admired it, but as a master of hounds he was obliged to call it a very ugly thing. He wondered aloud how deep it was.

"I'll see, sir," said Hammersley, and went clattering and splashing into it then and there. His big Irish horse went at it in true Irish fashion. It looked dangerous, and there was a chance of being killed, and so "at it you go;" and he got through. It wasn't half so bad as it looked. The water had

barely reached to his feet—they were only splashed. Sir Charles and Laura instantly followed, "The Elk" striding through it like an elephant, and Laura's smaller horse seeming to make as little of it as the elephantine Elk himself.

The Australians are probably the most reckless riders in the world, and the younger of them think nothing so fine as swimming a flooded river. But you find that the older they get the less they like it. After they have had a horse "capsize" under them a few times they get rid of their superfluous vitality by dangerous forms of steeplechasing, and "funk" the water.

Who can tell at what particular moment what we call an "accident" begins? Something suddenly happens, and while people are wondering what is the matter, limbs are broken and lives lost. The train begins to jump, and you have not time to look up from your *Saturday Review* before you find yourself amidst a ruin of wood and iron, with a lady screaming herself to death before you, and the last piece of fun in the small-print article in full possession of your brain. You watch a dipping sail in the Solent, and think it is dipping too deep; and before you can realise that anything has happened, the boatman bring you ashore a trembling idiot who, an hour ago, was a gallant young man, and tell you that he was to have been married to the young lady who was just drowned, and that he held her up until his arm gave way, and he was obliged to let her go. This is too terribly true!

Sir Charles saw Laura go safely on before him till she was almost at the other side, when her horse seemed to stumble and feel the pressure of the current; for he rolled on his side, and threw Laura beneath him. When he saw the horse's near hoofs rising to the surface, and Laura's arms only appearing above the water, and her little white gloves clutching about at anything and everything, then he realised the fact that there was an accident, and a terrible one; and tried to spur "The Elk" towards her, and towards the destruction which awaited them both in the seething cataract below.

But the good horse only floundered through the ford, and, getting on land, burst into one of his pachydermatous gallops; by the time Sir Charles, half-mad with terror, had turned him and had got back to the bank, he only saw this—

Laura's horse landing himself about ten yards above the waterfall; Hammersley's horse grazing, and Hammersley himself in the water, with his feet still off the ground holding on to an oak-root, with his arm round Laura's waist. Their faces were close together, and they were within five seconds of death, and he was

encouraging her to hold on. She held on. Sir Charles shouted wildly to them : to her to save herself for his sake—to Hammersley to save her, giving wild promises, which were luckily wasted, as they neither of them heard him. Before he had time to think of what he had said, they got their feet upon a shelf of granite, and came on land safe.

Laura was dripping from head to foot ; she was trembling too, but she was also in “ a mood,” as her father saw in a moment. He who had watched her so long and so well saw that she was agitated by something more than sheer physical fright at her terrible danger. He saw that she was in a mood, and guessed the cause, sagacious creature !

“ Laura, dear, you can't blame me. How could I guess that your horse would have stumbled ? I tried to ride down and help you, but this old brute of a horse wouldn't turn.”

“ I don't blame you at all, father ; I have no one but myself to blame. Bring me my horse, if you please, as quick as you can. Father, I am frightened ; take me home to my mother.”

Hammersley had caught her horse and brought it up, holding the reins of his own horse by his arm, and standing by her horse's head ; he spoke first—

“ Would you be kind enough to put Miss Seckerton on her horse, sir ? I have frightened her a little pulling her out of the water.”

Sir Charles did so, appreciating the high-bred instinct of the young man. The moment they were all mounted, the young gentleman, looking as sulky as a thunderstorm, said—

“ I think I had better ride home, sir, and tell them that Miss Seckerton is wet and frightened.” And without any more words away he went, as if he were a gentleman, without waiting for leave.

“ Laura, dear,” said Sir Charles, who had got very much afraid of her since the cessation of their confidence, “ let us go to the Downes ; you are wet through, and the housekeeper will rig you out in Constance's things in a quarter of an hour.”

“ I asked you to take me to my mother, father ! ”

“ But your chest, dear ? ”

“ Take me to my mother ; I want to go to my mother ! ”

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT now came a crisis in matters which led to strange results. Poor Laura will remember the 17th of June as long as she lives ; and there are more still who will remember the next day quite as well.

What encouragement poor Hammersley had ever received, which induced him to commit the most fatal act of folly he did, we shall never know. From Laura certainly none ; she had scarcely thanked him for saving her life. For the present we must suppose that Sir Charles had so far spoilt him, as to make him so utterly forget his position, and what was due to Laura, as to speak to her in the way he did.

It was very late in the June evening, and the few workmen who had been employed in doing a few stinging repairs in preparation for Sir Harry and Lady Poyntz were gone, and the Castle grounds were left in seclusion. Laura went over to walk there.

We know now that Hammersley had watched her and crossed by the bridge higher up, for another watched and followed him, impelled by an overwhelming curiosity.

He met her in a dark walk, and, going to her, spoke to her more familiarly than he had ever done before. He did not go far—she did not give him time. She stopped him the very instant he had gone far enough to make it necessary, but did not let him go a step too far. She had not been well-formed for nothing ; no one could do it better than she.

She was very quiet indeed with him. She first pointed out the extreme act of folly of which he had been guilty, and then dwelt on the extreme degradation and aimlessness of his present way of life.

“ If you are what you seem,” she said, “ I mean a gentleman, throw off this miserable disguise and way of life, and do something worthy of yourself—something which will make your fellow-men respect you. Take the advice of one who wishes you sincerely well, and go from here at once. Now go ; and, believe me, I shall be always glad to hear of your welfare. Good-bye ! ”

He went quickly, without a word. When she turned round to see if he was gone she was alone in the gathering gloom, and saw him no more.

“ Could her grandmother have been more discreet ? ” was the first thing she asked herself. The answer her conscience gave her was, “ Certainly not ! ” The very echoes of the summer’s evening seemed to tell of “ Cœlebs in Search of a Wife,” and

other high-toned books of that kind. She recalled every word she had said. It was in her grandmother's best style—nothing could be more eminently satisfactory. And then she began to cry.

As soon as she had moved away to a safe distance, no other person than old Tom Squire crept cautiously out, and looked after her round the corner. He was very nearly caught, for Laura turned and looked back suddenly; and he saw that she was crying bitterly.

“What! looking back to see if he'd come again, eh?” the old fellow chuckled. “There'd be a fine to-do if the lad had brains to follow you now, my young lady. Well, if gentlefolks don't know their own minds it's no business of mine; but he shall know of this, though he breaks my head for watching!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THOSE dreadfully inexorable people the chemists insist that there is just as much oxygen in the atmosphere on one day as there is on another, but it is very hard to believe. They make up their account with ozone, which is a very nasty thing. It is hard that one may not believe, in this age of toleration, that there is not more oxygen in the air on a brilliant crystalline morning, than on a dim, wild, murky autumn evening. However they are right, one supposes, and air cannot be oxygenated like water; otherwise the atmosphere round Leighton Court must have been represented by a fresh formula, on the morning after Laura's adventure in the castle shrubbery.

There was something in the air that morning, however, ozone or barometric pressure or something else, which got into the lungs of Sir Charles Seekerton, as he lay in bed, with his window open as usual, and made him get up and shave at seven, and moreover caused him to ring up Lady Emily's maid, and send her to Laura's room to challenge her to a gallop on the sands before breakfast.

The lady's-maid—a most superior woman, who “messed” alone with old Elspie the nurse, since a great quarrel in the house-keeper's room, which has nothing to do with this story—answered the bell with wonderful alacrity, and before Sir Charles had time to deliver his message, delivered her own: to wit, that the hunts-

man and the stud-groom had been waiting in the servants'-hall for him since six, and that she believed there had been an accident.

“An accident! To whom?”

One of the grooms, or helpers, or some one of the stable-people was drowned, she believed—young Hammersley, she thought. She belonged to the female side of the house, and shared in the opposition to horse-riding in any form, which was their creed, and which had led to the secession of her and Elspie from the house-keeper's and steward's room.

“Go and fetch them up instantly,” said Sir Charles. “And don't wake Miss Seckerton on any account whatever.”

On ordinary occasions Madam would have as soon had her dinner in the servants'-hall as show up any of the “stable-people.” This time, however, she made no further objection than gathering her petticoats round her and sniffing; she wanted to hear the news.

“Good heavens! what has happened, Dickson?” said Sir Charles to the stud-groom, who stood forwardst.

“Mr. Squire will explain, Sir Charles,” he said; “I am only here to make my story good about the horse.”

Sir Charles glanced impatiently at the terrier-faced little huntsman, and said “Go on.”

He still kept in the back, with his grey eyes fixed keenly on Sir Charles. He began at once—

“Last night I went to bed at ten o'clock. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when he came in in a hurry.”

“He! Who? Hammersley?”

The old man nodded. Sir Charles looked for a moment from him to Dickson, and then back again, as though he would ask, “Does he know anything?” And Squire shook his head “No,” and went on—

“He came straight to my room with a light, and said at once, ‘Get up, I must go far and fast to-night. I want “The Elk,” and I want you to get him for me, for,’ he said, ‘that infernal cross-grained old pig Dickson,’ meaning him you know (pointing at him with his hat), ‘would never let me have the horse at this time of night.’ I immediately did as he required.”

“And I, Sir Charles,” said Dickson, pompously, “following the routine of the establishment, complied with Mr. Squire's astounding request, and sent out the horse.”

“You did perfectly right, my good Dickson. You may go now.”

Dickson the astonished retired, and the old man resumed—

“He got on ‘The Elk.’ I asked no questions, I durnst. He is a Poyntz, you know, or as good as one I should say, and he was in one of his moods; but knowing Sir Harry was nearly due home, I thought it was a case of good-bye. I waited to hear him say it, but he did not till the very last; and then he said, ‘I’m off. I can’t stand this. Good-bye! You shall hear of the horse.’ And I said nothing. Then he said, ‘Good-bye, and God bless you! Come here.’ And I came to him, and he bent down and kissed my forehead.”

A pause. Sir Charles turned away, and went on with his dressing. The old terrier took up his story as soon as he found his voice; not a moment before—

“He turned to the left out of the Bell Yard, and broke into a gallop. Then I saw that he was going to try the sands that night, and I cried out, like a man in the falling sickness, ‘The tide’s making! the tide’s making!’ Perhaps he did not hear, at all events he did not heed. I ran, but what was the good of that? I heard him only a few minutes, but I ran on, guessing which way he had gone; and all I could find of him was the way that the deer still stood gazing as he had startled them. I heard him open the gate, and rattle down the lane; and when I got to the cliff above the Avon Sands, I saw that he was lost. He was three hundred yards out on them going like mad, and the breakers were not a quarter of a mile to his right, growling up fast before a strongish south wind. That’s the last I saw of him, and the last any man ever will.”

“Good God!” said Sir Charles; “you don’t actually mean to say that Mr. Poyntz is drowned? I wouldn’t have had this happen for a thousand pounds. He was worth the two other brothers put together. What makes you think he is drowned?”

“What makes me think he is drowned, Sir Charles? You have me there. I am afraid there is no hope at all.”

“But hang it, man, it can’t be true; it is too horrible! An author wouldn’t dare to put such a horrid thing in a novel, except Scott, of course, who has some devilish horrid things in his novels. Such things don’t happen in real life. I won’t believe it. Pish! I don’t choose to believe it. I don’t want to be shocked just now; we were going on so nicely, as if we weren’t all walking blindfold among venetian-glass; and now this comes. Poyntz was no fool; he would have turned from the tide and headed landward. That horse would beat any tide that ever flowed. You are talking folly!”

“He is drowned and dead. You say he was no fool. He was a madman last night; and I know they as drove him so. He got

on the Musselbank and was surrounded. Why do *you* talk nonsense, Sir Charles, about his heading up the bay? Don't you know he is dead? Ride his darndest, and suppose the sands were sound, where could he possibly make in time?"

"Barcombe."

"I was in a boat as soon as there was water to carry one, and I have been all along the other shore, to Barcombe and to Seamount, higher up, but they've heard nought of him. When the sea gives up her dead, Sir Charles, you will meet the best of all the Poyntzes, not before. Oh, my noble boy—oh, my noble, noble lad!"

Poor Sir Charles! He tried to fight against the probability of its being true, but facts were too strong for him. He had got very fond of this unhappy young man, and had more than a dozen times thought how well he would have liked such a son. Since he had known that his own ruin was only a matter of time, he had relieved the ghastly, sleepless watches of the night by picturing in the dark, when he was afraid to turn and toss for fear of arousing and making anxious the innocent unconscious wife at his side, what sort of a graceful home he could make himself at Wiesbaden or Paris; and this young Hammersley Poyntz, or what you choose to call him, had always made part of the home-group. And now he was dead, and in this dreadful manner!

Although he felt certain that it was true, yet he refused to believe it. For twenty-four hours he was able to say to neighbours that he did not believe it; that the young man had gone off with the horse, and all that sort of thing; but on the next morning there was no doubt about the fate of Poyntz-Hammersley, the nameless man, and they searched no more.

Riding under the red cliffs, Sir Charles and old Squire came upon a little cove or bay of golden sand, which ran up among seaweed-grown rocks; and here, with his head resting on a pillow of purple sea-tang, they found "The Elk" drowned and dead.

It was as well. The cruel quicksands had done their work thoroughly. The carcass of a drowned horse may pose itself artistically, and look grand and noble for a little while, but nothing can make the loose wet lips of a drowned man look otherwise than horrible. The mermaidens had kept their ghastly toy to themselves; or, to put it otherwise, the horse had had strength to struggle from the shifting quicksand, while the weaker man had been sucked down and buried for ever.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE wild July weather set in for a few days now. Nature generally gives us a reminder just about the middle of summer, that there is something to think of in this English climate besides deep green forest boskage, and calm cloudless summer days. Generally about this time she comes tearing back in her strength, to toss the boughs wildly to and fro, to flood the streams and beat down the ripening corn, and to say plainly, "You English, you nation of pirates, you and I are always at war! I am not beaten, but will beat you yet. Here are some wrecks for you; I will come again at the equinox, and fight with you all through your long dreary winter." And then up goes the drum and cone from Peterhead to Penzance, and the telegraph clicks out from one end of Britain to another—"Here she comes; look out!" And those of the small fry who abide her coming are hurled on leeshores, or tossed, terrified and storm-beaten, into holes and corners to hide themselves; while the larger ships and steamers toil grandly on, defiant.

Laura was looking from her window, and watched the dark weather booming and rushing from the south-west across the sands. The evening was darkening so much, and night was so near, that the few toiling ships passing up and down the Channel were getting too dim to distinguish through the haze.

The news of the accident had found its way early that morning from the servants'-hall to the steward's room, and from thence upwards into that sacred eyrie, which those two eagles of respectability—Elspie the Scottish nurse, and Lady Emily's maid—had got built for themselves alone above the base scolding of the shorter-winged birds below, and where they sat all day with their long beaks together over the table, turning over the bones of dead scandals, and scenting new ones. A little wide-eyed dove of a stillroom maid got bold enough, under the general excitement, to fly into their Golgotha, and tell them the news without having heard their bell: after which she wisely fluttered out again.

As soon as she was gone, old Elspie rose up and said to the Englishwoman, "I'll just gang up at once, and break it to her myself."

"I think you are wise, my dear soul," said Mistress Bridget. "Break it to her gently, my dear soul. That it should come to this! Break it to her gently. How very, very dreadful! But it is all for the best. Be gentle with it, my dear soul, whatever you do. Poor young man! But I didn't see my way out of the mess

till this happened. We have a deal to be thankful for in this, Mistress Campbell. Mercies are showered down on us every day. Break it to her gently, my dear soul ; but I fear she will break her heart over it, anyhow."

Elspie, as the saying goes, looked her through and through. Mistress Bridget had before made some feeble skirmishing attempts on Elspie of this kind—attempts to make Elspie acknowledge that there was some kind of mild flirtation between Poyntz-Hammersley and Laura, and Elspie had always stopped her advance with a dead-wall of Scotch caution. Her own darling Laura should never be talked about, by *that* woman at any rate ! She considered Mistress Bridget's last speech as a treacherous attack on her works at a moment of sentimental confidence, and she was very angry.

"Ye'll no sell stinking herrings in Kirkealdy, woman," she said. "And why should Miss Laura break her heart because one of her father's retainers is drowned in the sand, if ye please ?"

Mistress Bridget "caved in." It was very horrible—such a fine young man !—and so on ; she had not meant anything.

"Ye'd better not mean anything, woman," replied Elspie, leaving the room, "because I ain't just in the temper to stand it."

So she, who knew how matters stood as well as you or I, went upstairs and broke it to Laura in the fashion which her keen intellect told her was the best.

Laura was in her combing-jacket, combing her hair, when she came in. She stood at the door, and knocked her stick on the floor.

"A bonnie morn, lassie !"

"A beautiful morning, nurse."

"Ye ken young Hammersley, yer father's favourite man ?"

"Very well."

"He's drowned, drowned, drowned ; buried sax feet in the wicked treacherous sand, and his ain mither will never wail over his bonny corpse ! Sirs, he was a bonny lad ! I've a tear or twa left for him in my dry eye yet. The horse fought out of the quicksand and got drowned fairly—they found him just now in the cove below the Castle cliff—but your bonnie Hammersley is deid, smooed in the sand, halfway between this and Barcombe !"

And so she shut the door on Laura, and went downstairs to see if Mistress Bridget was inclined for a fight, which she felt would do her good, saying as she went—

"There, she has got it a' ! Poor dear, poor darling, she loved him ; and he was a bonny boy, a bonny boy, worth sax hun-

dred of your fushionless, doited potato-bogle Hatterleighs! She shall stay alone to-day. I'll tell that roundabout whisky-barrel woman Lady Emily, and that feckless auld dolly Lady Southmolton, that she is ill. They lang nebbit hawk-eyed women are best left alone in their grief. I mind me of a red-haired seceder lass taking the jocktaleg to her ain mither, but that's no exactly to the purpose. Laura is too lang in the neb, and too keen in the eye, to be meddled with this day."

"But," groaned out the old woman, "the Papister! If that man get hold of her now, in her trouble, she'll be a Papist in three months; and she'll fly to him now, and he'll pass her on to the abomination, the villain, before I am dead. I shall have to see it. I'll go in and see if Mistress Bridget will have a turn of words with me, and help me to put poor Laura out of my mind. They lang nebbit women—it's either Calvinism or Romanism with them. They must have it hot either way."

Poor Laura had been devising fifty plans to avoid seeing Hammersley again, supposing he had not done as she had asked him, and gone. One plan was to ask to go to her aunt's in London; another was to fall ill, and get taken to Bournemouth; another to tell her father just enough to make him send Hammersley away. But now her difficulty had been solved in this horrible way. She spent all the day by herself in a state of stupefied terror, sending excuses downstairs to say that she was shocked by the accident, and that it had made her ill. All day she stayed in her room, looking over the desolate sands until day began to decline. She felt alternately terror at his death, and terror at what she had escaped; tenderness, too, tried to make itself heard, but she resolutely beat it. "Not to-day, at all events—not to-day," she said resolutely.

As the day went on a resolution grew into a settled purpose, and at evening she rose to put it into practice. In her terror and her grief she fled back to those old rules of life in which she had been brought up. She would appeal to them for protection against herself; they had seemed to do much for her grandmother—let her see what they would do for her, now they were wanted.

She dressed herself very carefully, and went down to dinner. As she shut the door of her room, she said—"There! the discipline is begun; the last six months are shut in that room for ever!"

When she got down Lady Southmolton and her mother were laughing together, but they left off as she came in.

"My dearest girl," said the older lady, "you have had a sad shock."

“Why, yes—rather,” said Laura, in her dryest, hardest voice; “it actually made me ill for a little, Elspie announced it so suddenly. It seemed to me particularly horrible, that a fellow-creature was struggling for life within sight of our windows while we were comfortably laughing and joking. At what time was he drowned?”

“At about a quarter to eleven.”

“Singular! There was a light in my room just at the time, probably the only one on that side of the house. That must have been the last object his eyes rested on before he sank. Of course it is not so shocking in this case, as it was only a servant, but it is very sad!”

This I give as an instance of the mental torture she began to inflict on herself. Not an idle hour in the day was allowed now. The next day she walked up to the Vicar in the morning, confessed to him, and received absolution. He imposed a few penances upon her, which seemed to make her much happier, but they were very light ones indeed; for the Vicar was not only glad to have her back, having missed her sadly, but he thought, on the whole, that she had behaved uncommonly well. The principal thing he insisted on was, that there should be no more foxhunting; all the mischief had come from that, and there should be an end to it.

And Sir Charles put up a tablet on the church-wall to poor Poyntz-Hammersley, and “The Elk” sleeps beneath the immemorial elms in the corner of the Park.

END OF PART I.

PART II.

CHAPTER XXVI.

By the end of July, before the cub-hunting began, all the neighbours came cackling back again, with new ideas, new dresses, new people to talk about, new combinations to discuss; and poured into the Court, first of all, as being the most popular house thereabouts, to give the folks there—Laura especially—the results of their experience: as if there had been no change down here—as

if there had not something happened here which made their mere cacklings ridiculously unimportant—as if she had not lived a life longer than any of theirs since they had gone ambling away into the world.

There was a dinner-party, with some of the first arrivals, on a Friday—a haunch-day, as Sir Peckwich Downes called it. Laura appeared in grey silk, with no ornament but a crucifix; and, as it was a fast-day, mortified the flesh by taking nothing for dinner but turbot and lobster-sauce, oyster-patties, some omelette, a little cream, and some peaches and grapes. Her conversation, also, was purely theological. In short, with the highest and noblest intentions, she was overdoing the thing altogether; and when it was over, and Laura had gone upstairs, her father followed her into her room, and said—

“My sweetest Laura, I am not going to argue, to dictate, to command, or even to advise. I merely want to put this before you. Does not your admirable good sense point out to you that your suddenly-changed dress and manner are calculated to make people talk?”

“Dear me, father—let them talk!”

“After what has happened?” said Sir Charles, and thought wistfully.

“It shall be as you wish,” said Laura. “I quite see what you mean, dear; and don’t be impatient. The old confidence will come back in happier times. There—go!”

“It will come back in ruin and disaster,” thought Sir Charles. But his heart was lighter. “It will come back, at all events,” said he.

After this Laura never made any public—not to say offensive—renegation of the vanities of this world, but let her own common-sense have full play. She was thoroughly in earnest, though, and worked away like a cart-horse at her good resolutions. I suppose most of us have done what she was doing at one period of our lives, and have found, or have thought we found, peace in factitious activity about small things; and have ended by finding out that, like opium or brandy, the remedy destroys itself, and that “peace of mind” is not the greatest object in this world. But with this we have little to do; we must attend to more trivial matters. We have more to do with the succession of arrivals, which came on the Court people like a deluge of cold water; and had the effect, among others, of making Sir Charles quite forget that he was a bankrupt.

Constance Downes was about the very first of the arrivals. She was a fine, roundabout, bounceable, two-to-a-pew young lady

before she went ; but now she had sewed pillows to all her arm-holes, and was two breadths more round the skirt than she had ever been before. She embraced Laura, and, as she said, brought the news herself. She was engaged : to Count Ozoni Galvani, an Italian nobleman, it appeared ; who, if his brother, the Duke of Pozzo di Argento, a most dissipated and unhealthy man, died, would become golden pump himself ; but who at all events, even if that miserable little creature married, would have his mother's money. She was Miss Butts, it appeared, the banker's daughter, at Whitby. Laura congratulated her, but wondered how it was that Constance, with her beauty and her fifteen thousand pounds, had not picked up something better : moreover, wondered how much Constance Downes' dress had cost ; and whether " his mother's money " would stand such a tug-of-war as a dozen of such dresses a year : got entirely worldly, in fact, as she confessed to the Vicar next day, who was very impatient with her, though from a cause quite different to what she supposed.

With Constance, of course, came Sir Peckwich and Lady Downes, vastly deteriorated in everything which made them worthy, by their visit to London. They had both developed, or, more properly speaking, thought they had developed. Sir Peckwich, from an honest county baronet, had developed into a two-penny-halfpenny politician, and, what is worse in a story about mere social relations, an absolute bore. Lady Downes, an honest, roundabout, country-squire's wife, was now by way of being a fine lady, with about the same capabilities for being one, or of understanding what one is, as a donkey has of winning the Derby. A fine lady is a very rare and peculiar article, like certain wines. Any wine-merchant can *charge* you for them, but it takes three generations—three bottlings off, and a voyage to India, say, to supply the article. What it is worth when you get it is another matter. But your real fine lady is a thing of time and tradition ; you can't, to take the very lowest qualification of all, get at that unutterably graceful impudence in one generation. Mere Becky Sharp genius won't do it ; it wants tradition. The art is, they say, rapidly becoming extinct in England ; but there are a few fine ladies left still. We have lost utterly the art of designing decent buildings and statues, and of making bells ; but those who ought to know tell one, we have a few fine ladies left, though none coming in. One would say that fine ladies would, in the coming *bouleversement*, be found last in Prussia. Bismarek, though of the other sex, is, as far as we have been taught to understand the fine lady, the finest instance of the fine lady to be found out of England.

It is humiliating to confess that poor dear Lady Downes tried to be the fine lady before Lady Southmolton : but she did. She sat, and fal-lalled, and patronised, and talked about the Court, and cross-examined Lady Southmolton on the peerage, and on people. And Lady Southmolton sat and looked at her.

Colonel Hilton appeared next. He had been to Châlons, but not, as was proposed to him, to America. He looked handsomer than ever. He had found so much to do at Châlons, in studying the new military movements, that he had got another man sent to America. It had been very pleasant there and at Paris. The Poyntz people, Sir Harry and his bride, had been there. "At Châlons or at Paris?"—"At both." "How was Lady Poyntz?"—"Lady Poyntz was quite well," he believed.

Next the Poyntzes themselves came. Every one at one time had declared they would not call on them, but now, somehow, everybody did. Lady Southmolton went with singular promptitude, in the most public manner ; thundering through Winkwerthy ostentatiously, in the family Ark. It is supposed that Sir P. Downes would have refused to call, but his women-folks were too many for him. It was understood that Sir Harry would keep up the house much as the Huxtables had done, and Constance had a hundred pounds' worth of finery which she must wear out before the fashions changed ; and she, as bully of the establishment, had no idea of having a house closed to her down here, where there were so few. So they went, and everybody went. And Sir Harry received them with the most high-headed nonchalance, and showed them all, as plainly as possible, that he did not care whether they came or stayed away.

So the land became peopled again ; and before they had well heard and communicated all the news, Laura, one afternoon coming out of her room, heard Lord Hatterleigh cackling and screeching in the hall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ABOUT a fortnight after their arrival at the Castle, Lady Poyntz was sitting at breakfast, in her own room in the keep, the quaint four-windowed room in which Laura once met Sir Harry Poyntz.

Poor woman ! She had got back to the dear old Castle as its mistress—she had got title and position, such as it was ; but she

had made a sad blunder, and she had found it out three days after she had married.

Sir Harry puzzled and shocked her. He was unutterably false, but he was never in the very least ashamed of it; and as for physical cowardice, he boasted of it. With all this he had shown hitherto such a perfectly equable temper, and such an unmoveable persistency in gaining his end, that, on the two or three occasions in which their wills had crossed already, she had yielded, although a person of considerable strength of character. Once she had made him a scene, but it was no use: the more she stormed the more he laughed, in such an exasperating way that he left her pale with rage. She vowed to herself that he should never see her tears again.

Still it was his interest to treat her well, for only half her money was in his power, and he did so whenever she did not come between him and his object: when that was the case, his gigantic selfishness would have made him use cruelty towards her, had it been necessary.

"Lady Poyntz, I wish you would tell your women to get the blue room ready for to-morrow," he said on this particular morning.

"Certainly, dear: who is coming?"

"Captain Wheaton."

"Sir Harry Poyntz," she said indignantly, "you promised that you would not let that man enter the house!"

"I did not promise."

"You did, and, what is more, you know you did."

"Well, that was before we were married, when I wasn't sure of you."

"Or my money?"

"Or your money: exactly, and I can't keep my promise now—lovers' oaths, you know. I must have the fellow. He's an awful blackguard, but he is necessary to me. I will keep him in order for you. He is afraid of me—physically afraid I mean—as great a hound as that."

Lady Poyntz remained silent, considering how she should act, and, while doing so, fixed her fine dark eye steadily on her husband's. What a curious, shallow, cold, dangerous eye it was—the lightest blue she had ever seen with a kind of moonlight gleam about it! She would have died sooner than have turned her own eye away, and yet she would have been glad to do so. She made as though she were brushing flies away from her forehead, and at last said—

"Well, I have made up my mind; I suppose he *will* come."

"Most assuredly!"

“Then I shall not speak to him, and not allow him in the drawing-room. I must sit at dinner with him, I suppose?”

“Well, I think so. I am glad you are not going to speak to him; it will teach him his place. So that is settled; I thank you very much.”

“Harry” said Lady Poyntz, “do you ever hear from your brother in India?”

“My brother in India is an extravagant and dissipated rascal,” said Sir Harry; “I wish he was at Jericho! He has been costing me more money.”

“Is there any chance of his coming home soon?” she asked.

“I should like to catch him at it,” said Sir Harry. “Oh, I should so very much like to catch him at it!”

Maria had asked him this in good-natured curiosity, to see how he was disposed towards his brother, and to try and find out something of his character. She had been set on to this by her old friend, Sir Charles Seckerton. It was an important question to him, for *he* knew the state of Sir Harry Poyntz’s health. She left the result here, as being somewhat unsatisfactory. There was another matter on which she wished to satisfy herself, and thought it a good opportunity. She, as nonchalantly as she could, said—

“What a sad accident the Seckertons have had with their new huntsman!”

The light-blue eyes were on her in a moment. She thought that the fowl sat, and she stalked on.

He said, “Yes, I heard of it.”

“Did you know anything of the young man?”

“I suppose you do, from your manner, my pretty fencer. I guess that you know that he was our illegitimate brother. Is that not true?”

Maria laughed. “You are very cunning,” she said; but the blue eye was on her, still inquiringly.

“Who told you?” he asked.

“Lady Emily Seckerton,” she said. “What sort of man was he? Were you fond of him?”

“Very much so. I liked him better than any other human being—except you, you know, of course.”

“You seem to have taken his loss pretty easily; I did not notice that you were much affected.”

“I wished to spare your feelings; I was unwilling to disturb the happiness of your honeymoon by any exhibition of grief. Besides, it is one of the traits of my character that I never do show my grief. The remarkable fortitude I showed at the death

of my father drew tears from the nurse. She was drunk, and wanted to kiss me ; but I am sure she was in earnest."

"I suppose you could show equal fortitude at my death?" said Maria.

"That would depend entirely on what you did with the thirty thousand pounds which is settled on yourself. If you left it to me, as Christianity dictates, I should spend five-and-twenty pounds on a cheap tombstone for you, tear my hair, and take to drink. If you let it go back to your family, I should show my fortitude by looking out for another woman with money, as soon as—nay, long before—it was decent."

"Harry! Harry!" said Maria reproachfully, "are you ever in earnest?"

"Sometimes on money matters—on sentimental business, never. So drop it. Now, have you satisfied your curiosity about Poyntz-Hammersley?"

"I have satisfied my own. Now to raise yours. Do you like Laura Seckerton?"

"I love her! She is a paragon of a woman—so beautiful, so discreet, so careful not to wound with her tongue. Oh, I love her!"

"Shall I tell you something about her—your paragon?"

"Do; you will never bore me as long as you speak of her."

"Why, then, I will tell you," said the unhappy woman. "She fell in love with Poyntz-Hammersley; she made every kind of advance to him, which he, for decency's sake, reciprocated. When he was drowned, she took to her long-forgotten devotions, and went into mourning, until her father and mother forced her, with threats, to behave more reasonably. All this time she believed him to be a common groom from the stableyard. I know that she knows no more of him—no, nor does any one else, except her mother and her father. And this is your Laura: it is the scandal of the place."

Sir Harry drew his chair up against hers, and said, "Say that again."

"Why?"

"Because it is delicious; because it does me good; because it makes me love you. Wheaton shall dine in the housekeeper's room, in the still-room, in the coal-hole, before he insults my peerless wife by his presence! Say it again."

She told the story over, with additions.

"That is very good," he said; "you love her, don't you?"

"I hate her!" said Maria, but said no more.

"And I," said Sir Harry Poyntz, grasping his wife's arm—"I

hate her with a hatred which your spasmodic female nature has no power of understanding, leave alone of feeling! She hates me, and she nearly turned you against me (and your sixty thousand pounds, you know; let us have no sentimentality). She has used language about me here, there, and everywhere which a dog wouldn't forgive—and a dog will forgive, from his heart of hearts, far more than any Christian. I hate her! I can ruin her father any hour after six months; but the pleasure of ruining her will be greater than taking possession of the Court. How are matters going on with Lord Hatterleigh?"

Maria roused herself, and said: "I expect the engagement to be announced every day. The booby is always there. How long he will take about proposing, Providence only knows. When, where, and how he will do it I dare not think, but do it he will: and she will have him, and stop slander."

"Look here," said Sir Harry, with his wife's wrist still in his hand. "You have said you hated her, and I must do you the credit to say that you never lie, if that *be* any credit. We must let this engagement go on until it is talked of all over the county until it is in the *Morning Post*; and then we must revive this scandal, get it broken off, and drag her down in the dust. Tell me, woman (for I am blind about such things), is Hatterleigh, as they say in their cant, man enough to pitch her overboard for this?"

"He is one of the first men who would do so. But I am not prepared——"

"Then I will prepare you. It was well done in her to trifle and play with our dear friend, Colonel Hilton, and then throw him over for a roughrider!"

Maria could not help catching her arm away. "Have I married the Fiend?" she thought, and Sir Henry Poyntz laughed and left the room.

This interview had opened both their eyes a little. Maria saw, by this last unutterably wicked speech of his, that her husband knew that she had been in love with Colonel Hilton, and that he had tried to see whether that was the case still. He, from the snatching-away of her arm when Hilton and Laura's names were mentioned together, had seen that it was. Alas! he was right. Poor Lady Poyntz had tried to get over it; but the first few days with Sir Harry had opened her eyes, and Châlons and Paris had done the rest. She found herself tied to a hopeless, shameless liar and coward; while that glorious melancholy-eyed hero Hilton had, now that Laura's baleful dark eyes were out of the way, fallen in love with her. It was all Laura's fault; she would have

won him in time if it had not been for Laura. So, when her husband had asked her, she had said, "I hate her!"

But had that very unaccountable scoundrel, Sir Harry Poyntz, known anything about the better class of women, which he did not, he would have observed that Maria's "I hate her!" was said in a snappish tone, which, with a very little extra passion, would have gone over the hysterical border, and come to be, "I love her." The fact was that there was nothing more than temper, and a very little matter of that, between her and Laura just now. Lady Poyntz had thought a good deal since she had flown out at Laura on the subject of Colonel Hilton just before she was married: had reflected what a high-minded, noble friend Laura had been to her; how the real fact was that Laura had never encouraged Colonel Hilton, whereas Colonel Hilton had undoubtedly made, in his cool procrastinating dandy-soldier way, a considerable deal of love to Laura; and that Laura had only told her the truth about her husband, after all. But still she had a little devil of jealousy and evil temper at work in her heart—a little devil who was sometimes almost powerless, but who got very active and powerful whenever her husband had the management of him.

Sir Harry had just been showing off the paces of that little fiend, and he was full rampant. But even now, in the hour of that fiend's power, poor Lady Poyntz knew in her own mind that she could never bring herself to join her husband in his scheme for ruining Laura. She felt pleasure in the indulgence of her ill-temper towards her, but only in imagination: she knew she would never reduce it to practice, although she went to bed indulging in the anticipation of doing so.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Poor Laura, terrified, had retired into her shell, and was by no means the genial outspoken woman of old times. Besides, Maria Poyntz had given the first offence, and should therefore make the first advance, which Maria, after the extremely precise, not to say demure, manner in which Laura had received her, felt very little inclined to do.

"She might surely come and see me?" sulked Lady Poyntz. "I have not committed any crime." But assuredly she did not;

and as sulks grow by indulgence, the chances of a reconciliation seemed to get more hopeless as time went on.

Laura's mother and grandmother were astonished to find all their old influence over her completely restored. They were such very wise women that they never mentioned this astonishment even to one another. They perfectly understood one another, and agreed without speech that the reins now recovered must not be drawn too tight, and, moreover, must be loosened on the first symptom of restiveness. They need not have been uneasy; they might have driven her hard enough now. Part of her scheme was the giving up of her own will, and the more they had asked from her the more she would have yielded. One difficulty she had—a comical, foolish little difficulty enough, but one which gave her a deal of trouble: she was determined to yield to the Vicar's wish about foxhunting, and she dreaded telling her father of this resolution. Moreover, she was afraid of giving rise to remarks. Something occurred, however, before cub-hunting began, which made this matter easy for her.

We were great admirers of the late Admiral Fitzroy, and at one time thought Mr. Burder a most shocking man for doubting his entire infallibility. Certainly, some of the admiral's hits about the weather were nearly miraculous; but it was a low class of cunning. It was done mechanically, and he was always telling us how he did it—a great mistake in a thaumaturgist. It was almost a low class of cunning compared with the foresight which even an ordinary woman will exhibit, not even empirically, but intuitively, about the social weather. Compared to such a woman as Laura, the late Admiral was quite behindhand, and would have confessed it in a moment.

There was bidden a great picnic party to the place which we, with our fine imagination, have hitherto called "the glen of the hundred voices," but which is marked on the Ordnance Map as "Crab's Gut." They were all to start from the Court at twelve; and when Laura had finished her breakfast, and found herself alone in the room with her grandmother and her mother, she saw that there was something in the wind—that they were going to say something important to her. She couldn't tell you exactly, like Admiral Fitzroy, the process by which she arrived at her conclusion, but the conclusion was no less certain. They were, especially the elder, both well-trained women; and Laura knew that they would take, with their wonderful tact, a long time in telling her. She knew perfectly well what they were going to say, had her answer ready, and wished it done. Nevertheless, she was a ritualist: forms must be gone through. They did not

ask her to stay in the room. She looked at them and saved them the trouble, stayed without being asked; looking at them both steadily.

Lady Southmolton, looking out of the window: "What a glorious day for it! I wish I was going. I wonder if I dared trundle round in my pony-carriage and see you all. I am afraid not."

"You must not think of such a thing, mother," said Lady Emily; "it would be too much for you." She had by this time come round to Laura, and was stroking her hair.

"That'll do, mamma," said Laura to herself. She said aloud, "I don't think you had better, grandma. It's a long way, and the roads are rough. No, I wouldn't."

"How are you going, dear?" asked Lady Southmolton, sweetly, as her mother kissed her back-hair, in irrepressible admiration.

"With peas in my shoes. It is Friday, you know," said Laura; and didn't say anything more, which was worse still. It was abominable and undutiful of her, in the highest degree, to pull out (if one may be allowed a simile, taken from Lady Southmolton's constant occupation) her grandmother's knitting like this! However, the old lady gathered up as many stitches as she could, and clicked away again. Lady Emily, getting frightened, and being (as was always the case when she was wanted) utterly useless, continued to stroke Laura's hair, till Laura very nearly went to the extreme length of asking her to leave off.

Lady Southmolton got up a ghost of a giggle, and said something about their dear Laura's spirits, which, seeing that dear Laura was sitting before her, looking very stern, and getting paler each moment, seemed to be somewhat misplaced. She was a brave old lady, however, and went on with her business, as per arrangement with Lady Emily—plans rather traversed by Laura's vulgar answer about the peas in her shoes.

"Colonel Hilton is coming with his phaeton, my love; he would be delighted to drive you." This had been part of the leading-up business, but went amiss: it came in the wrong place, and didn't fit.

Said Laura: "If he don't drive Maria Poyntz he may drive any one else. But he sha'n't drive me. And if he drives her, I shall not go. Neither would you, mother, would you?" facing round on her mother at the same time.

Lady Emily kissed her daughter, and most loyally answered, "No, I would not;" after which she gave the whole business up

to Lady Southmolton, and confined herself to kissing Laura at all the important pauses.

“Now go on, grandma,” said Laura.

In spite of this traversing of plans by a slightly contemptuous Laura, the old lady nailed the last rags of the original programme to the mast, and fought for them to the end. She had been going to do the thing in the proper way, as that sort of thing was always done. The responsibility of any deviation from the programme should fall on Laura’s shoulders. She solemnly played her next card, just as if Laura hadn’t just trumped one of the same suit.

“Lord Hatterleigh,” she said, in as offhand a manner as she could manage—which was very badly, for Laura had been “odd” with her, and she hated “oddness,” and was nearly eighty—“Lord Hatterleigh has borrowed your mother’s pony-carriage, and will be delighted to drive you. Will you go with him?”

“Yes.”

This was worse than before—enough to make Mrs. Hannah More rise from her grave. Here was a young woman with opinions of her own, with some shadowing-forth of a character. That transcendently perfect and angelical muff and ass Cœlebs would never have got on with Laura: a young person who exasperated her own grandmother with such answers as that about the peas, or, failing that, monosyllables like this last “yes,” and drove her to make her grand speech before she had half got through the hour’s fencing and “beating about the bush” laid down in the programme. It was intolerable! Lady Southmolton came to the “toast of the evening” at once—

“My love, all that I have previously said, and which you have somewhat impatiently heard, was intended to prepare your mind for this great fact: Lord Hatterleigh has been to see your mother!”

Why does one feel inclined to laugh at a funeral? Laura felt so much inclined to laugh at her grandmother’s bathos, that she gave herself great credit for keeping her countenance. Yet she knew—who better?—that it meant a life-important decision. She was all alone, poor girl! Her heart was with Poyntz-Hammersley, who was drowned in the quicksands: that we know well. Her father and she were estranged. It was not a matter for the Vicar’s ear, for it was not all her own matter—one half was Lord Hatterleigh’s. She had, she thought, nearly done a great wrong to her family, and would atone for it at all risks. No: she had no soul to whom to go to for advice and assistance; for she had

travelled out of the grooves of her mother and grandmother's ways of life and thought, and could not return to them again, try she never so hard. And, above all, she really was fond of that Guy Fawkes Lord Hatterleigh; she knew his worth, and so she said—

“Well?”

“Well, dear, we were going to say that in all human probability he will speak to you this morning; and that if you could give us the very slightest hint as to what answer you would give him, you would remove a great load from our minds.”

“I will give him any answer you please; I will say exactly what you like. What do you wish me to say?”

Lady Emily kissed her and wept; Lady Southmolton went on. She would not influence her for one moment, she said; but then went on to point out to her the innumerable advantages of such a match, if Laura could only bring her mind to it, and so on.

“I gather from all this,” said Laura, “that I am to say ‘yes.’ Well, then, ‘yes’ it shall be. Now I think I will go and get ready. Here are the carriages coming round.”

Lord Hatterleigh had come over to breakfast that morning, but had spoken word to no one, save salutations—except to Granby Dixon, M.P., the man who knows everybody, and turns up everywhere. Lord Hatterleigh had eagerly seized on Granby Dixon the moment he came into the house, had sat next him at breakfast, and talked to him incessantly and pertinaciously about the Limited Liability Bill. And that kind and worthy little soul, under the impression that he was doing a good-natured action by undertaking Lord Hatterleigh, had led him on. Not that he wanted much leading, however, for he was evidently determined to stick to the Member for Brentford like a leech; and after breakfast took him out into the garden, and stumbled up-and-down beside him, offering a strange contrast to his dapper companion. All this was somewhat irritating to Lady Emily, who knew what was coming; but her wrath rose to a towering pitch when she heard Lord Hatterleigh say to Granby Dixon, just before they started—“Come with me, Granby, and we will have it out in the carriage.”

“This is too bad!” she said to herself. “His own arrangement too! However, he shall not play with me like this.”

She saw that Granby Dixon had gone upstairs to put on his boots, and that Lord Hatterleigh was in the porch. She stood by the stairs. Granby's dandy little boots were soon heard tripping down the stairs; him she seized, and eagerly said—

“Mr. Dixon, my dear friend, don't go with Lord Hatterleigh: *Laura* is to go. I have known you so many years, I know I may trust you.”

He grew grave. "It is easily managed, my dear Lady Emily; where is Miss Seckerton?"

"In the library. Thank you very much!"

Granby Dixon went after her with his brightest smile and his lightest trip, and found her sitting alone in the library, ready-dressed.

"Lord Hatterleigh is waiting for you, Miss Seckerton," he said cheerily; and she rose at once without a word, and took his arm. She was rather pale, and he felt her arm tremble just once, but she was perfectly self-possessed when they got among the other people; and Granby chattered away merrily, and continued to do so until he had packed her into the pony-carriage beside Lord Hatterleigh, who had got in and was sitting on the left side, waiting for Granby himself—having made the last feebly desperate effort to gain a little more time.

Granby saw them drive off, and found his warm little heart nearer to his eyes than he liked. He chattered and made himself agreeable all day to every one, but at night he said to himself when he was alone in his bedroom—"God help that poor girl! God Almighty help her! Oh, it is monstrous—monstrous!"

Meanwhile Lord Hatterleigh had said to Laura: "Will you drive, Miss Seckerton, as you are on the right side?" And Laura said "Yes," and away went the pony (an Exmoor—that is to say, having a considerable share of Barb blood, and standing fourteen hands) like a steam-engine. They were out of the park and through Winkworthy before either of them seemed to find time for speaking; but when the pony slackened up the first hill, Lord Hatterleigh laughed, not with his ordinary idiotic cackle, by any means, but pleasantly enough, and said—

"I am glad you drove. I am such an outrageous muff that I can't even drive a pony. This pony would have found me out before this, and run up a tree, or done something or another."

"You should practise," said Laura.

"No good—no good! I have practised shooting, but I shoot so badly that my own brother swears at me. I was sent into the world with two left sides; I am an ambisinister. I can't even catch trout—at least I only catch junior and inexperienced trout, and I fall into the water in doing that. Now, who is to answer for this state of things? What is the good of my having sixty thousand a-year if I have two left legs and another man's arms?"

Laura suggested that he might do a great deal with his money. She mentioned hospitals, industrial exhibitions for the working-classes; but found herself dwelling on flower-shows, being in a foolish frame of mind, and naturally harping on the most foolish

idea. She forced home the necessity of these flower-shows upon him with considerable volubility; but finding herself somewhat entangled in proving the moral effects of china-asters, she saw that she was talking unutterable nonsense to gain time, and wisely held her tongue until it was all over.

“Well, I do go in for that sort of thing, Laura,” he said. “God knows I do heartily whatever my hand finds to do, but I am what they call a muff; and if you married me, you would make me little else. The time is gone by—nay, the time never existed. But, Laura, I am neither coward nor liar, as you will find if you say ‘yes’ to the question I am going to ask you. Can you marry me? There is no hurry for your answer. I urge nothing in my own favour, you observe. Give me an answer before we reach the end of the next mile, and that shall be final.”

Laura could not help turning and looking at him. She had her answer ready, and was determined to deliver it face to face, with her eyes on his. So she turned; and she saw him as she had never seen him before, and knew him for the first time. Now that he was sitting in perfect repose—now that his fantastic manner was out of the play—she saw what a noble creature he was. She was clever enough to know that his brain was not first-class—that his family was getting worn out; but she had sense enough to see that his face, now that it was at rest, was a very noble one—and to feel that the calm patience with which he waited for her answer, showed that he had a gentleman’s soul in spite of his fantastic habits. I suppose it was her woman’s instinct which told her that he was in love with her; but woman’s instinct is a thing which I don’t understand, nor you, and least of all the women themselves.

He soon felt that she was looking at him. He turned on her kindly and, to say the truth, grandly, and said—

“Well, is the answer ready so soon?”

Laura said: “The answer has been ready since this morning. My mother prepared me for all this. The answer is, ‘Yes.’ If you had asked me at breakfast-time this morning, the answer would have been a complimentary ‘yes;’ now it is a very decided ‘yes’ indeed.”

“Then you think you can get to love me?”

“Not better than I do at present! I always loved you, Lord Hatterleigh, and I love you better than ever now. I think you are a noble person; but you do not do yourself justice. Let me give you our first confidence. This morning I was ready to submit—now I am ready to acquiesce. I think——”

Ah! that one glance at the wild tide-beaten sands, far below

their feet, which showed her that she was speaking falsely, though she meant so earnestly and so honestly every word she said! Step out, old pony, and carry us deep into the green woodlands beside the rushing river; and leave the sands far behind, with the dead man buried in them. The dead man's memory walks there like a ghost, and will walk for ever; but like other ghosts, if not seen, will be forgotten and discredited. On into the woodlands then!

They all met in the glen, at a place where the trees were so high, large, and dense, that you could only see the overhanging cliffs here and there among the topmost boughs. The river, tired of streaming from crag to crag of granite, slept in a deep black pool, over whose surface the foam-flakes slowly travelled in gentle curves. There was silence close at hand all around; but, farther off, the ceaseless rush of water came softly and pleasantly to the ear. About the edge of the water were broad shelves of granite, mostly carpeted with moss; while on the edge which ran farthest into the pool, there stood a great Logan-stone, which seemed as if a child's hand might topple it into the river. The summer sun streamed through a deep boskage of king-fern and hazel. It was a perfect place for a picnic!

Laura and Lord Hatterleigh noticed to one another, as soon as they looked round, that the central figure in the landscape was a very singular one. Sir Harry Poyntz happened to be standing apart from every one, on the edge of the water, looking about him. He had dressed himself, as he usually did, very oddly, and looked utterly unlike any one else. With the exception of the blazing breloques on his waistcoat, and the rings on his fingers, everything about him was brilliantly black and white—white trousers, waistcoat, and hat, but a black-velvet coat and lacquered shoes, all in a state of catlike cleanliness and neatness.

"Look how that fellow's clothes are cut," said Lord Hatterleigh. "They won't make such clothes for me; and it's no use my going to *his* tailor. Look at him, Laura! Do you see that he is blowing his nose, and that he has a tinted handkerchief and primrose-coloured gloves, which have the effect of making his waxen complexion look healthy? Did you ever see such a clever fellow?"

Laura had no time to laugh, as she felt very much inclined to do, for Sir Harry Poyntz came towards the pair; and with a smile on his face, but none in the cold shallow blue eye, asked Laura, to her great surprise, if she had seen Colonel Hilton?

"He is not coming; indeed, he was not asked, I believe," said Laura, with the most perfect coolness—a coolness which had the effect of irritating her mother extremely. She wanted to get

some hint of the result of the drive in the pony-carriage: "Had that booby spoken?" Laura gave no sign.

"Oh! bother it all," said Sir Harry; "isn't he coming? Then I shall have to take care of my own wife; this is too bad!"

"I can take care of myself, Harry, I daresay," said Lady Poyntz, bridling.

"Can you?" said he. "From watching you and him together, I should have thought that you could scarcely have cut up your own dinner without him!"

"What a reckless lunatic that man is, George, to speak so to that poor woman!" said Laura, aside, to Lord Hatterleigh.

It was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name; he turned, and looked at her gratefully; and Laura was astonished, he really looked very handsome. Could this be the booby of this morning?

"Where will this end?" he said to Laura. "What can the man be doing it for? To gird at her in society before they have been six weeks married! I can't endure that fellow, Laura. I know nothing of him, except this, that I *hate* him!"

"You should not hate anybody, George."

"Very like—very like! But I hate that man, however. Are you fond of cats?"

"For the sake of argument, no. But why?"

"Because that man is a cat. Look at him; look at his stealthy grace—look at his perfect cleanliness and neatness, and look at his hopeless, unutterable selfishness. I'll go up, and make him purr for you directly. Did you ever see anything more wonderfully *bizarre* and attractive than the fellow's dress? If he chose to be decently civil to his wife, that sentimental whiskerando Hilton would have no chance with him. Hiltons are as common as blackberries; any one could manage *him*—there would be no credit to her in dragging *him* at her chariot-wheels. But there is only one Harry Poyntz. If he would only allow her, before society, the reputation of having mastered such a notoriously dangerous tiger as he is, she would be proud of him, and would get to love him. But he won't; it is not his game; I can't understand his game the least in the world. I suspect there is a good deal of caprice and whim about the man. Those effeminate men acquire feminine vices, I expect: childish love of power, causeless ill-temper, and cap——"

Laura looked at him with the corners of her mouth drawn down demurely, and they both burst out laughing.

Sir Harry and Lady Poyntz were having a few words meanwhile.

"I cannot conceive, Harry," she said, "what you propose to yourself in treating me like this in public. If you could help it I shall be glad; if you can't, I shall retaliate. I could be very disagreeable, mind!"

"Oh no, you couldn't, my love; you couldn't say anything which these dear friends of ours have not said a hundred times over. Bless the dear little fool, you haven't heard half the lies about me yet! But there is no cause for anger in this case; I only chaffed you about Hilton because I saw it annoyed Laura Seckerton."

"I wish you would not sharpen your wits on your wife. Why don't you bring Captain Wheaton, and make him your foil?"

"The people won't have my helot; my helot gets drunk and becomes offensive, and what is amusing to me is disgusting to them. Take care where you are standing, you will catch fire. By Jove, you are on fire; take care!"

It was true. The grooms had made a fire on the rock, as being a necessary part of any picnic; and Lady Poyntz, in drawing herself up tragically before her husband, had backed against it, and her flowered muslin dress was sending up half-a-dozen tiny wreaths of white smoke, just preparing to burst into a blaze.

Laura and Lord Hatterleigh were watching the pair, and saw the accident. Laura gave a wild scream, and Lord Hatterleigh a roar. He rose up, tore off his coat, and, as he hurled his ungainly length towards them, was heard by the terrified spectators to cry out—

"Throw her down, Poyntz; throw her down into the wet moss. The fool, why does he stand staring there! Are you fit for nothing in heaven or earth? Throw her down."

By the time he had relieved his feelings so far, he had got hold of her and fairly tumbled her down, trying with his coat to smother the fire. Fortunately for her, they fell together among deep wet moss at the edge of the water, with the fire underneath. But the fire was strong; and Laura, standing horror-struck, saw his long, lean, delicate white hand in the midst of it four or five times as he tried to smother it with his coat, before his own groom, the first man who recovered his senses, put it out by baling water on it from his hat.

Then Lord Hatterleigh got up, and Lady Poyntz was helped up; and there was a general shrieking and gabbling, in the midst of which Laura came up to Lord Hatterleigh's side, and found him thanking his groom.

"I am personally obliged to you, Sanders. Your family has served our house for many years now, and has always been dis-

tinguished, with one solitary exception" (brother of this Sanders, say the Archives, who got himself bored to the borders of Bedlam, and enlisted in the 16th Light Dragoons—a rebellious Sanders) "for their dexterity and devotion. This shall not be forgotten."

The present Sanders merely touched his hat in acknowledgment, and pointed out to Laura, as being a thing which decidedly concerned her more than any one else, that his Lordship's left hand was terribly burnt; after which he went for old Doctor Buscombe, who happened luckily to be one of the party, and who was wandering in the wood with Lady Emily, gathering bilberries, and hearing all about Lady Southmolton's symptoms.

Laura took Lord Hatterleigh's arm, and led him away. When she dared to look at his left hand she nearly cried out. It was all burnt up into great bladders—but no more of that. He tried to laugh, but it ended in a feeble cackle.

"Lucky it wasn't the right one—eh, Laura? Shouldn't have been able to write. I should have been obliged to dictate my Limited Liability pamphlet to you; and you're so stupid, you know; you'd have made a hundred blunders, wouldn't you, now?"

"I should, indeed. Sit down here, and let me tie my handkerchief over your hand. I don't like this."

"Don't like what?"

"This, all of this. It is all getting so tragical, and so terrible. Oh, George! George! do, whatever happens, stay by me, and see me through it. Do let me believe that there is one other human soul in whom I can trust. Be friendly to me, George; I have no friend left but you. I always loved you, George—I always trusted you. Be a friend to me, George, for I am all alone, George—all alone, all alone!"

This from his imperial bride, whom he thought so hard to win! It set him thinking. He could think rapidly, and generally to the purpose; besides, to use a term, which I cannot replace by a better term, "his heart was in the right place. His answer was soon ready, rough as it was—

"Laura, if the Old Gentleman himself comes between you and me, let him take care. I am a peer of England, with sixty thousand a year; that still counts for something, even in these latter days. What is the social status or income of the gentleman just alluded to, I don't know; but let him take care—a British peer is still a very terrible person! Make me your husband as soon as you can, and we will face it out together. Pitch me overboard to-morrow, and we will face it out just the same."

Their *tête-à-tête* was ended. The Doctor was seen approaching rapidly with Sir Harry Poyntz, who was trying to look as if he had been to fetch him. While the Doctor was untying Laura's pocket-handkerchief from the burnt hand, Sir Harry spoke to Lord Hatterleigh in a gentle quiet voice, without one touch of scorn, and apparently without the slightest *arrière pensée*—with the strange recklessness of a man who has offended the world past forgiveness, and has become utterly contemptuous of it—

“I have to thank you for saving my wife's life. That is, I believe, supposed to be a great obligation, although it has cost me thirty thousand pounds. I am very much obliged to you, and all that sort of thing. I was utterly taken aback when the accident happened, and she would have been burnt to death before I should have realised it, and then I shouldn't have known what to do. You have shown an extraordinary amount of courage and sagacity—you must see that yourself. I have entirely changed my opinion of you. I always thought you a half-witted booby; and so did you, you know, Miss Seekerton?”

It was horribly, viciously true—it was as wicked a thing as ever was said; but Lord Hatterleigh's quiet beautiful good-humour took the sting out of it in a moment, and made it perfectly innocuous—

“I don't know whether she *thought* so; I can only answer for her having diligently *told* me so for the last ten years. Eh, Laura?”

“My Lord,” said the Doctor, “we must get home and have this dressed.”

“But I don't want to go home.”

“You must.”

“Pish, Doctor! I am determined to stay out and enjoy myself.”

“Enjoy yourself! You know you are in terrible torture?”

“By no means; I am enjoying myself thoroughly. Take Sanders home, and bring your bandages, your cotton-wool, your fiddle-faddles back. You needn't be gone half an hour. Home,” quoth he—“not if I know it!”

“Hah!” said the Doctor to Laura, “the symptoms are worse than I thought. Fever is setting in; he is getting *tête montée*.—My dear lord, I am astonished that one who has always taken such care of his most valuable health should trifle with a serious accident of this kind.” And here they all three burst out laughing.

“Don't let him chaff me, Laura. But, seriously, is there any *danger* in my staying out?”

“No *danger*,” said the Doctor; “only, if you persist in staying out, I shall think that Sir Harry Poyntz’s former estimate of your character was—was—well, I won’t say what.”

“And Miss Seckerton’s too, remember. A half-witted booby, eh? Well, I’ll submit; I must act up to my new character. I suppose you couldn’t quit this festive scene, Laura, and drive me home. By-the-bye, Doctor, I ought to tell you I am engaged to Miss Seckerton.”

“A bad thing for me,” said the Doctor.

“Very bad. If you are the man I take you for, you will go and get the pony-carriage for us. I’d do the same for you.”

“We shall see,” said the Doctor to himself, as chorus, going on his errand, “what stuff there is in this good-humoured gaby. There may be something. He comes of a good stock, and has shown pluck and resource to-day; but I fear he has thought about himself and his inside too long, and that this is only a grand show-off. *Noblesse oblige*, but noblesse and dinner-pills—bah! I can’t believe in it yet. He has got that peerless girl to consent to marry him, and he is bent on showing that he is not the miserable effeminate ass which the world has written him down. When the necessity for showing off before her is gone, he will sink back into his own valetudinarian selfishness again. A man don’t study himself for fourteen years, to the exclusion of all other matters, and then turn out a hero at the end. She, pretty storyteller, has been telling him that she loves him—oh, woman! woman! woman!—and he has believed her. When he finds out how she has lied, the last state of that man will be worse than the first!”

But when the Vicar heard of it, he said: “I always thought well of that young man from a boy. His mother nearly spoilt him, but he will do now. He only wanted arousing.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

AND so Laura was enabled to say, without exciting any surprise, on the day before the cub-hunting began—

“I shall not hunt this year, my dear father. George has pressed me very eagerly to do so, but I don’t think it would be fair on him. He can’t hunt himself.”

There was, undeniably, good sense in this. Sir Charles sighed

and gave up the question, seeing that he should have to hunt his short remaining time by himself. But he found her waiting for him at his early breakfast. She made him his tea as of old, paid the little attentions to his necktie, and made him as smart and as spruce as possible; and she sent him off with a kiss, and stood laughing at the door in the early autumn morning, as the tall, spare, gentlemanly figure rode down the avenue alone. She noticed how bent he was getting, and said with a sigh—

“ Well, and so there’s an end of all *that* ! I shall wonder at nothing now. I knew a young lady once, called Laura Seckerton, and a jolly young lady she was ; but I don’t know what has become of her. There is the church-bell ! ”

The Vicar had been profoundly astonished at this engagement with Lord Hatterleigh. If he was in any way offended with Laura for not having asked his advice, he was too sensible, with all his fantastic ritualisms, to show it. He knew that if Laura had ever had the slightest idea of following his advice, she would certainly have asked it. Therefore, when she told him of it, he only gave her his affectionate blessing ; and as soon as he could get rid of her, went and told his wife, saying to her what we have mentioned above as *per contra* to the Doctor’s opinion.

The “ Umbrella ” was rather more savage about this engagement than she was about Maria Huxtable’s. Her life is only noticeable for these few outbreaks, as the history of a volcano is only the history of its eruptions. On this occasion she made an A.D. 63 business of it. After twenty years’ quiescence she rose upon her husband, and overwhelmed him ; he being as unsuspecting of such a thing being possible, as ever were the inhabitants of Pompeii, when they saw something like a fir-tree fifteen thousand feet high. Yes, she turned on him for the first and last time. Their servant (probably an idle and untrustworthy minx, given to leasing) put it about afterwards, that she actually shook her scarlet-gloved fist in his reverend face : it is pretty certain, seeing that he told the whole business to his most excellent gossip Sir Charles Seckerton, that she “ went in on him ” very much in this style :—“ This is a most villainous business ! Those exasperating old trots, Lady Southmolton and Lady Emily, are allowing the girl to sell herself. Do they know that she was in love with Poyntz-Hammersley ? ”

“ With whom ? I didn’t catch the name.”

“ Yes, you did. With Poyntz-Hammersley, the man who was down here in disguise. Do *they* know that—that they are allowing the poor girl to sell herself, for bare respectability’s sake, to this tomfool ? I daresay they do. You do ! ”

“How do you know that?”

“I know it now, at all events, because you don't dare to deny it. And knowing it, why didn't you prevent her making this engagement?”

“What power had I?”

“None, I hope; for I should be sorry to think that, if you had any, you would have been such a coward as not to exert it. Why can't you confess at once that you had no power, after all your boasting?”

“My power is limited at a certain point.”

“So it seems; stops short of the useful point—very short.”

“Georgina, you are losing your temper——”

“I am not!”

“But I could easily forgive you if you were. I don't like it, but will you be good enough to tell me what I could have done?”

Only indignant twitching of the red gloves. The Vicar had administered a puzzler; and he, seeing his opportunity, dexterously and at once soared up into a vast moral height, and regarded the red gloves, as though through the wrong end of a telescope, in infinite perspective—

“Your instincts, like those of most women, are good; your capacity of judgment and your knowledge of logic are, as in the case of *all* women, contemptible. I would have prevented this if I could, but I could not. No one knows better than yourself that the wholesome power of the priest is, for the present, circumscribed in a shameful manner.”

“You might have done something. You might have gone to dinner there Friday week—fast-day—what is a fast day to Laura's happiness? Besides, there were filleted soles and crimped skate—Mrs. Border showed me her bill-of-fare—and you might have spoken your mind. You might have spoken out quietly to Lord Hatterleigh, that he was notoriously the greatest gaby and goose in the Three Kingdoms, and that he never could be happy with Laura; or you might have wrapped the whole thing up in an allegory.”

“As how?”

“That's entirely your business. You are clever enough at allegories, when you choose. I never know when you are speaking in allegories or speaking the truth. I thought it was all true about Saint Bristow, till you told me it was an allegory, and the school-children believe it as much as the Babes in the Wood to this day. If you had gone to dinner on Friday week, and wrapped it up in an allegory, the thing would have been stopped. As it is,

Laura Seckerton is, entirely owing to you, going to marry Guy Fawkes !”

CHAPTER XXX.

GUY FAWKES, however, as the Vicar's wife called him, made a most attentive lover : he used to ride or drive over from Grimwood every day, and spend many hours with Laura, interfering sadly with the regularity of her life, and her methodical arrangements ; and of course she submitted uncomplainingly.

Nay, more. These interruptions of Lord Hatterleigh were far from unpleasant. Those good folks who said to one another, “ How can that noble girl endure that booby for ten minutes ? ” knew very little either of Laura or of Lord Hatterleigh. In the first place, all her hundred-and-one rules and regulations, though bravely persisted in, were, so far from being any relief, becoming intolerably irksome. They had always been tiresome to her in the old times ; but she had grown into the creed that the only difference between an Englishwoman and a foreign woman, the only difference between an immaculate saint and an ordinary sinner, consisted in the adherence to these aforesaid rules. That the immaculate saints, when they did fall, made a far worse mess of it than the ordinary sinners, who had not pitched their pipes too high, she had long suspected ; but she had been brought up to consider that the only life possible for a decent woman was that of the well-regulated British female of the superior classes, and on to this belief she had engrafted the Tractarianism she had learned from the Vicar. Whether the creed she had knocked up, between Hannah-More regularities and ultra-high-church regularities would not hold together, or whether her mind had all along been too extremely ill-regulated for either, is a question we must leave to abler hands to decide. We have only to do with results ; and the results were, first and last, unsatisfactory.

Last, more particularly : when she had that terrible fright about Poyntz-Hammersley, she began to believe her grandmother once more, and fled back to her old formulas. She found them deader than ever—so very dead, that when she recognised that the submitting to Lord Hatterleigh's attentions was part of her duty, she found at the same time that his babble was the only thing in life that she cared for. When he was absent she went on with her other duties—her regular reading, her poor, her

schools, or what-not. But as day after day went on she began to look more eagerly for his coming, and, to his great delight, to chide him for being late. She had always liked the man, and she liked him better day by day. Though he at first gobbled like a turkey-cock, and blundered about like a hobbled donkey, yet what he said was far better worth hearing than anything else she heard; and as for clumsiness, he improved rapidly.

“I wish,” he said once, “that I could put you on your horse.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Because then we could ride together; and it seems shameful to me that you should have given up your riding on my account.”

“Would you like to ride with me, then?”

“I would give anything to do so; but I should pitch you over. And I can’t ride.”

“You ride well enough, and the stud-groom can put me on. Do you desire that I should ride with you?”

He laughed, and so did she. “I make a formal request that you ride with me.”

“I obey, of course,” she said. “Will you ride with me to-morrow?”

“Shall we go with your father to the meet?” he said eagerly. “I know you would like it.”

“What can we want at the meet, my dear George? Every man can’t ride to hounds, and you can’t. I don’t love you or respect you one whit the less for it, but I don’t want you to be sneered at by all the horsebreakers and horsedealers on that account. Come with me over the sands.”

So they went—farther and farther each day; poor and schools being more and more neglected for a week. At the end of that time, Laura made her appearance one night in her father’s dressing-room, as of old, and, putting her arm round his neck, said—

“George and I have got such a quarrel with you, you wicked and unfeeling old man!”

“My darling, why?”

“You never come and ride with us; you treat us like the dust under your feet. If you want us ever to speak to you again, you will come and ride with us to-morrow.”

He could only kiss her and cry. Poor old gentleman! with all the ruin hanging over their heads, and he afraid to realise it to himself, still more afraid to tell Lord Hatterleigh the truth. But he came with them day after day, and, for the first time for so many years, was sorry when a hunting-day came, and they

were separated. He forgot that he was ruined during these rides; he only remembered it in the dark watches of the night, while the unconscious Lady Emily murdered sleep by his side. They rode everywhere, these three, Sir Charles pioneering—by the river, through the woodlands, up the glen, on the mountain ridge, along the sands. They talked of everything—of hounds, politics, other folks' housekeeping, Constance Downes' match, bullocks, ploughs, cottages and their improvement, horses, and servants. But there was one horse they never spoke of—"The Elk;" there was one servant they never mentioned—Poyntz-Hammersley; and there was one ride they never rode—the bay under Leighton Castle, where "The Elk" lay dead on the morning after the dark night in which Poyntz-Hammersley had been lost in the quicksands.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"It is all getting so terrible and so tragical," said Laura once before. So it was, though she knew nothing of her father's impending ruin. She could see that her mother and her grandmother knew nothing, or would know nothing, of the great tragedy which was being played around them: of her state of mind, for instance, with regard to Poyntz-Hammersley and Lord Hatterleigh; or, again, of the relations between Sir Harry Poyntz, his wife, and Colonel Hilton; which last were getting horribly confused in Laura's mind. Whatever happened, she was sure that they would have a respectability handy, and would get over it: "My dear, he was a handsome fellow, and Laura behaved with great discretion—far better than poor dear Lady Becky;" or, "My dear, he used her shamefully, and she went off with Colonel Hilton. She must never be mentioned again." Laura was right. If they had known of Sir Charles' difficulties, they would only have said, "Poor dear Charles has been living too fast!" That would have been their formula for ruin; and they would have gone to Baden with the utmost complacency, and without any loss of dignity. The thing had happened before to dozens of people in their rank of life, and with their way of living; therefore, there was nothing shocking about it—nothing particular to grieve about. Laura knew this, and knew that it would be a more shocking thing, in her grandmother's eyes, if Sir

Charles had sold his grapes or his game, than if he had lived beyond his income in doing usual extravagances, and had landed them *au premier* at Brussels.

She had done with these two ladies, and she felt less inclined to renew her confidence with them every day; for she had found a friend—Lord Hatterleigh. Every day she felt more respect for him, and every day she felt more and more that, with that noble, high-minded, highly-educated oddity at her side, she could face the world in arms. There was not perfect confidence between them, and that made her at times uneasy. Much as she loved him, he was no lover of hers. One night, while Sir Harry Poyntz was walking up and down his room, and thinking when he should begin to poison Lord Hatterleigh's mind against her, she was tossing on her bed, brimful of the resolution of breaking off her engagement with Lord Hatterleigh, and taking him for her friend. She never did so. She let things drive; she did not move in the matter any more than did Sir Harry Poyntz. They both bided their time.

But the pleasure she felt in the confidence and conversation of this man was very great; she revelled in it. She told him everything (save that one, and got to forget that, and to act about it as she did when it first happened—to shove it back into her deepest consciousness, with such success that she thought it was going to stay there). She told him of her systematic bringing-up and her early rebellions—and he laughed; of her religionism—and he spoke gravely and well, praising her and blaming her confidentially and sensibly: showing her the absurdity of running into these extremes, and, in the end, persuading her to return in a moderate manner to her old routine; and, as part of it, took to going to church on saints' days with her himself. Her grandmother could not have been more discreet than this youth; sometimes, however, she was forced to laugh when he got too priggish. There was perfect equality between them; it was all give-and-take. He was a strong anti-Tractarian—would have been, if he could, leader of the Oxford Liberals; and they had many a fine fight over that matter. She, on the other hand, was merciless about untidiness, and bullied him systematically about his personal appearance, until he got to put on his clothes in a decent manner, and to come into the room without falling into the fireplace. In short, they did one another a great deal of good—as any two honest people may, if they will only speak the truth to one another. She by degrees laughed him out of his sententious Daniel-come-to-judgment way of talking; and he, though sometimes in a

fantastical way, put more good sense and knowledge of the way in which the world wags into her head than ever had been there before.

In the full luxury of the new-found confidence between them, the following dialogue took place one day when they were riding together :—

“ George,” she said, “ there is something very near my heart, and you must share it.”

He said—&c. &c. &c.—just what you or I would say.

“ Don’t cackle ; and you shouldn’t giggle after such a speech as that ; and you have got your feet too far in your stirrups, and are turning your toes out. Men who don’t hunt shouldn’t ride like grooms. Keep your toes in as if you were in the Row.”

“ Is that what was so near your heart ? ”

“ Now, pray, don’t be funny ; remember the bull in the china-shop.”

“ I will—and turn my toes in too. There ! Now then, Laura ; if you are going to be serious, be so.”

“ I am not at all sure that you are in a fit state of mind to be consulted with ; you are a trifle rebellious, and I have a good mind——But, George dear, let us be in earnest ; I want to speak to you about Maria Poyntz.”

Lord Hatterleigh looked over his shoulder to the groom and said, “ Go home to the Court, and borrow me a clean pocket-handkerchief from Sir Charles’s valet.” And he went.

“ What about her ? ”

“ Is there nothing to be done ? Is there no way to warn them—to warn her ? ”

“ Do you wish to try ? ”

“ I only want your sanction.”

“ Then you have it. God speed you ! ”

CHAPTER XXXII.

“ HAS Captain Wheaton come in ? ” said Sir Harry Poyntz to his valet one day, about half an hour before dinner.

“ He has been in some time, Sir Harry ; he is smoking in the library.”

“ He has no business to smoke there, unless I am present. Did you tell him that he was to come to me the moment he came in ? ”

“ I did, Sir Harry.”

“ Then why the devil didn't he come? Lawrence, that man is getting too much of a gentleman for us; he must have a lesson.”

“ The best lesson you could give him, Sir Harry, would be to pack him about his business.”

“ But who is to do the dirty work—the spying, informing, mischief-making, gaining information, and so on? *You* won't. I have asked you more than once, and you flatly refused. Who is to do it?”

“ Nobody, Sir Harry; leave it undone.”

“ Ah! but you're a fool, you know. There is not a man or woman within ten miles who is not a rogue—except you, you know, of course, and my Lady Poyntz—of course I except my Lady Poyntz—and roguery must be met by finesse. Send him up.”

He soon came, whistling: an evil-looking creature, with his eyes too near, too deeply set, and too shifty, and a nasty grin on the mouth of him, which fortunately could only be guessed at, not seen, under his beard.

“ I'll tell you what, Wheaton,” said Sir Harry; “ I'll give you five pounds if you'll shave.”

“ What for?”

“ I love my money better than anything in this world—except, of course, virtue, and my Lady Poyntz; but I would give five pounds to see your villainous face without all that hair on it: only as a matter of curiosity I would. I hate this beard-and-moustache movement. One used to be able to tell a rascal by his mouth; now one has to look at his eyes. However, it don't much matter in your case; in more difficult ones it might be different.”

“ Have you called me up here to insult me?” said Captain Wheaton.

“ Yes: partly that, and partly to hear your report of your rascally eavesdropping expedition.”

“ The devil is on you strong to-night; Lawrence had better sit up with you again. Bedlam isn't such a nice place as Poyntz Castle.”

“ Bedlam, you fool! In the first place, I am not in the least degree mad; and in the second place, I have had another attack of angina pectoris this morning, so you'll soon be in Newgate. You won't be out of jail six weeks after my death, and I can't last many months. Now then, report progress, and let us have no more nonsense.”

"I went," said Captain Wheaton, "at your desire, into the pleasance and watched Miss Seckerton and Lady Poyntz, and I was lucky enough to hear some of their conversation."

"Sagacious touter! And neither of them horsewhipped you, as the boy Custance did at Newmarket? And how did the fillies gallop?"

Wheaton never looked at him, but went on: "I heard their conversation. Miss Seckerton was telling her what a fool she had been to pitch Colonel Hilton overboard, loving him as she did, in a fit of ill-temper, for such a worthless, effeminate, shallow knave as you."

Such a silly lie! But he, who disbelieved every other word the man said, believed this. He had exasperated himself against Laura: this man Wheaton had helped in it to his utmost, hating her with his deepest hatred for the utter scorn which always shone on him out of her eyes; and Sir Harry Poyntz believed him.

"I really must play the deuce with this young lady—I really must. I am very sorry, for I rather like her when she is wicked. Go on."

"And then I came round the corner on them."

"What an infernal hang-dog scoundrel you must have looked! What did they say?"

"Do you want me to drive a knife in you, you brute!" cried Wheaton, rising in a catlike rage. "I'll do it some day if you go on torturing me and insulting me like this. Do you think I can't feel?"

"If I thought you couldn't feel, I shouldn't do it."

"You make my work too hard for me. I didn't mean to lose my temper. You are ungenerous—you are ungentlemanly to use me so. And it is such bosh! You can be kind enough at times. Why do you madden me against you like this? You know you ain't half such a devil as you want to make out."

"Silence! You interrupt my line of thought. Well, I won't do it any more; if you weren't such a hound I shouldn't do it at all. About this young lady: I'd let her be Lady Hatterleigh, and madden her life away when she found out the truth, only I shouldn't be alive and shouldn't see it. Besides, she's a shrew, and I hate her; but she is too good for that. I think I shall merely administer a severe castigation, which I shall have the pleasure of seeing, and teach her to keep her tongue between her teeth. I shall not give you any money to-day; I will not be threatened with knives."

"That's it! Devil's pay! You never gave me anything for

making the huntsman drunk, and getting him to tell me that he saw them kissing one another in the garden; and now you are going to ruin her on my information."

"There is scarcely a word of truth in what you say. In the first place, it wasn't in the garden—it was in the shrubbery; in the second, they didn't kiss one another, but fell together by the ears, and blew one another up consumedly; and in the third place, I am not going to ruin her at all, but only to give her a lesson about the management of her tongue. Saving her from Lord Hatterleigh cannot be ruining her. She can marry Bob; he would take her with any reputation for the sake of the estate. Lastly, if either you or the huntsman say one word—you know what I mean—I will pitch you overboard (and you know what that means); and I will ruin his master, and take uncommon good care that that rascal Robert shall turn him off the estate."

"About Lady Poyntz and Colonel Hilton?"

"Silence, sir. My domestic affairs are none of your business."

"Are you going to sell up Sir Charles Seckerton?"

"That is a matter of detail. Go and ask Lawrence for my cheque-book." (He brought it.) "You don't deserve anything—you and your knives. How much do you want? Want, I say; what matter is it how much water one pours into a sieve?"

Wheaton mentioned five-and-twenty pounds.

"Then you will want the dog-cart to drive to Exeter, and I charge you five pounds for that; that makes twenty. A man of any gumption would bring back a couple of hundred. But you can't play billiards, and you never will. Why do you go on trying? None of you catfaced men ever can play. I would give you points, and have all this money back to-night, if you dared to play me. Here's fifty pounds for you: in the name of decency take a fortnight in losing it; I don't want you before that."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"You have got your hat on the back of your head again, George," said Laura, one afternoon. "I wish you wouldn't; I am always telling you of it."

"Why shouldn't I? It's very nice."

“If looking like a lunatic is nice, that’s nice. No one does it out of Bedlam; it makes you look as mad as a hatter.”

“—— does it?” He mentioned a statesman, at the sound of whose name the earth quakes to its centre.

“Then *he’s* mad,” said Laura, “and ought to be locked up.”

“You can think better when your hat’s like that,” said Lord Hatterleigh, “and I was thinking.”

“What about?”

“I was thinking when we ought to be married.”

“That’s my business. I have thought about that, and come to a decision. My decision is, next year.”

“I will see if I can make you alter it.”

“There is not the least use. George, I want time. George, I must and will have time. Do you accept my decision?”

“I suppose I must.”

“So I suppose. Now go and dress for dinner.”

“It is very early.”

“Use the interval in abstraction from worldly affairs and contemplation. No great work of art is accomplished without that. Put the whole force of your intellect into the subject for the next half-hour, and then, when your valet comes to you, you will have grasped the subject yourself, and will not be dependent on a mere expert. Get to feel yourself safe without your expert. Why, if anything was to happen to him, you wouldn’t be able to dress yourself, and would have to put the thing in commission. Look at the Admiralty, will you?”

And with these whirling words she left him, and went in, but not to dress just yet. She went upstairs past her own room, higher yet, to the room which old Elspie inhabited with Lady Emily’s maid, and she found her alone.

“Elspie, dear, how are you?”

“I’m braw, my bonny bird. And I’m as strong as maist of these southern lasses yet, praise be to God! And how is my Lord?”

“He is very well—and he is very kind and very good, Elspie, which is better still.”

“Bless him! A noble heart! I wish I had had the nursing of him. Your feckless queans of southern nurses—see what they’ve done with him! His heid gangs ane gate, and his legs the ither.”

“He is mending, Elspie; he is mending.”

“I’d mend him! Why does his Lordship keep the Tullibardie Moor, that his brother Lord Charles should kill the grouse, and send them south to him? Why does he no go north, and brush

the bare lean legs of him through the heather? When he came south again he'd be for kicking your Colonel Hilton downstairs. Laura dear?"

"Well?"

"When you are married, take his Lordship to Scotland; and oh! my darling, take me with you. It's a bonnie country, this England, and I love it; but let me see Scotland again before I die. I am an auld fule, and I'll confess that Fern Tor is grander than Schehallion, and that Wyselith is bonnier than Tummle; but take me back to Rannoch, darling, once more, before I die. I'm a hale old woman, I'll no dee on the road. If I dee there—I *will* dee there, Laura, and lie with him on Tummle side, with the roar of the Waxing Burn in my ear, until the dawn which knows no night begins to wax in the Cairn of Schehallion——"

"That's all about long ago, and about long to come," said Laura, looking out of the window across the sands. "Elspie, tell me this: how long does it take to live down love?"

The old woman had risen, and had been getting a little excited, as the images of the crystal mountain, the long-drawn lake, the snarling river, the whirling snowdrift, the crashing thunderstorm—all the wild incidents of that wondrous fairyland, Perthshire, came flashing on her aged brain. But she sat down now suddenly, and watched the back of Laura's head with her keen grey eye.

"How long does it take to live down love?" she repeated slowly. "Weel, that just depends on the person ye speir of. There was Luckie Macdonald of Dall; Sandy Macpherson of Aberfeldy died in the snaedrift aboon Rousemount, coming over to see her, and she married Rab Grant, one of Lord Breadalbane's keeper's before her second sacrament. (The deil mend the pair of 'em!) Then there's my ain case, again. I have been forty years forgetting him, and have not done it yet; but then I have no tried, ye ken. Of whom were ye speiring?"

"Of no one in particular; of such a person as myself, say."

"O, yersell. Oh, forty-five hundred and sixty-seven years; and ye'll no do it at that, lassie. Gang down and dress for dinner. Mistress Bridget will be here the now for her tea. I'm loth that she should hear you talking your nonsense. Gang down—gang down to my Lord."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TIME went on, until the months had nearly made up another year; but nothing happened of any sort worth relating, and only two things progressed which are worth mentioning by us.

One thing which progressed was Sir Charles Seckerton's ruin. There was no doubt now that he was in the hands of Sir Harry Poyntz, for the interest on the mortgages was openly paid to his man of business; yet neither man took any step. Sir Charles lived on the same as ever, and Sir Harry Poyntz never made the slightest allusion to his affairs. That some contraction in the household expenses must be made, and that the hounds must go, was pointed out continually by Sir Charles' man of business, but entirely without effect.

"I am cheating no one; they will all be paid with interest. I want to keep my daughter and my hounds one year more; when she goes they may go. *Laissez-aller*. I have lived with all these faces round me, and I don't want to see the old style changed, and the old circle broken up. Either in my time, or soon after it, the Yorkshire money will set everything straight."

"Not at this rate, Sir Charles."

"Pish, man! Lord Hatterleigh is a model young man, who knows every sixpence he spends. He will put the whole matter right, after my death."

"The smash may come any day, Sir Charles."

"Well, I shall not make the smash myself; I am not going to take to shambling about the pump-rooms at Aix-la-Chapelle till I am forced."

No sense could be got into his head. The old prestige had become too dear to him. A grand handsome crash would have pleased him better than saving himself by any retrenchment. He even stopped the ordinary cut of timber that year, to the actual detriment of his woods. And it seems curious enough that he confessed afterwards, to a certain acquaintance of mine and of the reader's, that the man towards whom he had the greatest jealousy—the man from whom he most jealously and proudly concealed his difficulties, was his old tried friend Sir Peckwich Downes—a man who would have lent him a hundred thousand pounds on moderate interest, and put him square.

His man of business, in despair, made a schedule of his liabilities, and tried to get him to look at it, but he refused point-blank—

"I know in a general way that the estate will pull through,

if we get time. I'll make the change when Laura is married. There will be an excuse then. I shall miss my daughter, and so on. At all events, I will go on for another season; and there are fifty contingencies in my favour—Lord Hatterleigh—the Yorkshire property—I know not what. Let be."

"But if Sir Harry Poyntz comes down?"

"Let him. Let me hear no more about it; only keep the whole thing quiet."

That was all his distracted man of business could get out of him. In some unlucky moment that most innocent attorney had bought and hung up in his parlour Hogarth's print, in "Marriage a la Mode," of the morning after the rout, in which the old steward is going out of the room with only one bill on the file, and all the rest in his hand. It became so offensive to him now that he had it removed. He could do nothing more, except wonder at the extraordinary reticence of Sir Harry Poyntz, and the equally extraordinary insolence of Sir Charles Seckerton towards Sir Harry, the man who could ruin him at any moment.

For Sir Charles was riding the high-horse with his neighbour of the Castle. The relations between Lady Poyntz and Colonel Hilton were not pleasing to Sir Charles Seckerton. They were going about too much together; Colonel Hilton had got his leave of absence unreasonably prolonged. The whole state of affairs between those two was of a sort which had never been tolerated in this extremely moral county of Devon: and Sir Charles found it incumbent on him to put on fawn-coloured pantaloons, a buff waistcoat, a blue coat and brass buttons; and mounting his most solemn cob—the property of a late Bishop, picked up for a song (sixty guineas) at that prelate's death—and followed by the most solemn and handsomest of all his enormous choice of grooms mounted on a vast hack (another bargain), he rode round to the Castle to give Sir Harry a piece of his mind.

The solver of difficulties says, in his reckless way, that both this horse and this groom went into the undertaking trade—the one as a hearse-horse, and the other as a mute. He talks too fast sometimes; but there is no doubt that Sir Charles on the Bishop's cob, followed by the hearse-horse and mute, looked most awfully and severely respectable, and would have frightened any one except that strange, fantastically incomprehensible creature, Sir Harry Poyntz, who, as he viewed the enemy's approach from the window, broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which he was unable to stop.

"You're going to catch it," he said to his wife. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for a hundred pounds. Just look at the solemn

pomposity of the old fool, will you, Maria? What have you been up to, eh? Hallo, it's me he wants! I hope I shall keep my countenance."

After a solemn shake of the hands, Sir Charles went gravely into his business, more in sorrow than in anger. Sir Harry listened patiently, and made reply—

"I assure you I think you labour under a great mistake. I cannot say how much I think you are mistaken. I have honestly the fullest confidence in Maria—dear me, the utmost confidence, not only in her, but still more in Hilton."

"Well, I have done my duty. I have known you from a boy, and have taken the liberty of telling you what the county said."

"The county are a parcel of cackling idiots—all except, you know—in short, with the exceptions which common politeness requires. If they knew anything about present society, they would know that every woman of any pretensions to fashion has a follower."

"It is a shameless custom!"

"I don't see it. You, at all events, should not complain of it in this case. You knew all about me from a boy, and it was you who sold the girl to me, and it is you who are spending the money now."

The poor old gentleman rose up deadly white, and laying his hands to his heart, gave a pitiable groan. Such a bitter, bitter stab!—so reckless, so needless, so horribly cruel, and yet so bitterly true! He turned towards the window, and leant his head on his arm.

Sir Harry Poyntz rose at the same time. He cursed himself and his own tongue with a refined sort of blasphemy which none of us need guess at. He cried out to Sir Charles to witness that he was a fool, a lunatic, who didn't know what he was saying; and, lastly, besought his pardon on his knees.

Sir Charles turned on him at last and said: "Leave me alone a few minutes, and I am at your orders. Let the pain of the wound go off a little before you give me another."

And Sir Harry went back to his chair, and took up a book of pictures—no other a book than our "Tom and Jerry"; and when Sir Charles turned on him after a considerable interval, he was to all appearance deeply engrossed in it.

He knew that Sir Charles had turned towards him, and instantly began the conversation—

"The cleverest thing in this most marvellous book is the figure of the beggar scratching himself. Now, did your Hogarth beat this man?"

“I want you to be serious, Harry.”

“I’ll be perfectly serious, my dear Sir Charles; I have much more to be serious about than you have.”

“How can that be?”

“I have been to London to the doctors—real doctors, none of your tin-pot, twopenny-halfpenny, secondhand leech apothecaries, but Savile Row, you know. And they say I am dying; I have angina pectoris. I could have told them *that*. But it appears that my brain has been softening for years, and that if the one thing don’t carry me off I shall die a drivelling idiot. It appears that I can seldom have been sane since I was sixteen, and that my lucid intervals will get rarer. Do you forgive those wicked words I said to you just now?”

“Most heartily, Harry; but I can never forget them—they were so terribly true!”

“Fiddle-de-dee!—you’ll forget them fast enough. I’ll send you out of this room six inches higher than you were when you came into it. Sit down.”

Sir Charles did so, wondering what was to come next.

“You feel humiliated. Of course you do. So you ought, if you have any of the feelings of a gentleman left. You see I can be keen enough in my lucid intervals. You thought, forsooth, that you were going to incur pecuniary liabilities, and then march out of the whole business at twelve-and-sixpence in the pound, with your nose in the air. Now, no man with the feelings of a gentleman ever did that yet, and you have the feelings of a gentleman. I am sorry I spoke so cruelly to you just now, because I love you very much; but it is an uncommonly good lesson for you. You lay it to heart, and don’t get yourself up in the heavy-father style again, and come here to lecture me.”

“I take my rebuke, Harry. But be merciful; I am an old man. You shall have your bond to-morrow; I will announce my ruin to-morrow morning. But don’t say any more cruel things.”

“Announce your ruin! For God’s sake, Sir Charles, don’t be a lunatic! I have got this pain in my chest coming on again, and I cannot talk much more; this attack may kill me. Listen to what I say, and go home and think about it, without any further discussion. Your daughter Laura irritated me, in one way and another, beyond what my temper could bear. I had a plan for ruining you and disgracing her. But I have given it up. I am a bad fellow and a great rascal, as you, who have known me from a boy, well know. But I am ridiculously superstitious, and I want to die without leaving any one anything to forgive.

Come, there is nothing foolish in that. I could ruin you to-morrow, but I won't. While I live you are safe (Why you don't retrench I don't know—that is your business). But during my lifetime you will have mercy, afterwards none. What do you know of my brother Robert? Come, speak out."

"I have heard that he was very dissipated and wild, but that we attribute to——"

"To false reports spread by me? Come, speak out, man; you don't know how much depends on it. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"Ask any one who knows him—but you don't know any one, though—if I am not right, half spendthrift, half miser. Even I had to send him off. You will get no mercy from him; you'll be sold up, body and bones, as soon as I am dead."

"You are not dead yet, Harry."

"Ah! but I may die to-night. Have you not brains to see your only course?"

"I can't say I do."

"Break off this match with Lord Hatterleigh," said Sir Harry, looking very keenly at Sir Charles. "I was going to do it once from far other motives, but will do it still if you hesitate. Break off this match, and marry her to my brother. He will come home from India in a most marriageable frame of mind. Those two queer rumpty-tumpty old trots of yours, Lady Southmolton and Lady Emily, would have him to book in a week."

Sir Charles passed over this disrespectful mention of his womankind, but rose in wrath on the other side of the question—

"Sell my daughter, sir? Never!"

"Hang it, old fellow! You know," said Sir Harry, nursing his knee, "you sold Maria to me, as you have confessed. And you have sold your own daughter to a Guy Fawkes who wears his boots hind-side before. Surely you can do it again? But whether or no, you think of it, and bring your mind to it. It seems shocking now; but it is wonderful what you can bring your mind to, if you only put yourself *en visage* with it soon enough. Now go home, and don't say a word to me, or I shall die before it will be convenient to you. Only remember this: break off this unnatural match between your daughter and Lord Hatterleigh, or else I shall have to do it myself."

Sir Charles rode back again. The groom and the horse which followed him were as portentously solemn as ever; but Sir Charles sat huddled together in an undignified manner, and rode badly. And the cob stumbled once or twice—a thing we must attribute

to the uncertain hand of poor Sir Charles ; for when ridden by his late master, the Bishop, that cob had never been known to stumble. But then, his Lordship was a man so certain of his conclusions, that his certainty communicated itself to his horse ; whereas poor Sir Charles was in a perfect sea of bewilderment. No wonder the pony stumbled !

CHAPTER XXXV.

THIS last conversation must have taken place nearly a year after the eventful midsummer on which we have had to dwell so long—not long before the time when fresh and startling changes took place ; which changes conclude that period in the lives of our friends which seemed to me worth speaking of, and which also bring my story to an end. It is now my duty to speak somewhat at large of Colonel Hilton.

“What business he had here at all,” said Lady Emily one day, “was a thing which no one could find out.” But, whether he had any business here or no—here he was ; and we must decidedly agree with the county that he had much better have been anywhere else.

He had returned invalided from the Crimea, but had soon got well ; and had found himself in the course of duty at Plymouth, doing some work or another, nothing very much the matter with him. He was in a deservedly high position, and was able to take things very comfortably. He was asked, of course, to Leighton Court ; and at once it occurred to him that it would be a very nice thing to fall in love with Laura, which he immediately did—in a sort of way. What was unfortunate was, that Laura did not fall in love with him ; and, what was worse still, Maria Huxtable did, and, not being so well-formed a young lady as our poor Laura, let him see it. Of course, he was flattered and pleased by this ; though to himself he said that it was a most unfortunate and unhappy business, that a very beautiful girl with sixty thousand pounds should have shown herself ready to be asked by him, as it was impossible that he could return her affection, and all that sort of thing. He pitied the poor girl extremely, and was very kind to her indeed.

Fall in love with her he could not. She was vulgar beside

Laura, he said ; and she had a dog-like way of following him about and persecuting him, which exasperated him to the pitch of madness. If the poor silly girl had only waited for him to make love to her, instead of making play at him, she might have been Mrs. Hilton. But she wouldn't. She had no mother, and had had no training. She thought, in her simplicity, that her little artifices to get near him, to touch him, to get him to speak kindly to her, were utterly unsuspected ; while Hilton was driving back in his dogcart to Plymouth, and saying, " Hang it all, that girl is worse than any girl who ever made a dead set at a man in India ! It is perfectly sickening. The women in England are losing all sense of modesty. But I like her better than the other one, after all."

For his imperial majesty, after having bound himself to Laura's chariot-wheels for a few weeks, and having received nothing but impertinence from that young lady, had begun to dislike her amazingly, and to show it. He had got a certain sort of contempt for her. She sets up for strength of character, but she lets herself be led by the nose by a priest. She is positive, and will never confess herself wrong ; but she is as often wrong as right ; and she has such a deuce of a tongue ! Colonel Hilton, after all his knockings about, did not feel at all inclined to " hang up his hat," as the soldiers say, with Laura. Besides, he did not want to marry at all, if it came to that.

A few weeks made a great change in his sentiments about marriage. Hitherto he had been getting all the kicks and none of the halfpence of this world. And now, just when he could look about him, he neither felt inclined to tie himself for life to such a very positive and contradicting person as Laura, or to a jealous spaniel of a woman like Maria. He went back to his work, leaving Maria, who had created a fiction that Laura had stood between him and her, in a state of jealousy and anger against Laura.

It gave him a pang, however, when he heard that Maria was married to Sir Harry Poyntz. Every one knew everything about Sir Harry Poyntz except those most concerned. Hilton, who knew that she was in love with him, was shocked and distressed at such a shameful sacrifice ; and while at Châlons, hearing that the Poyntzes were at Paris, left his duty to see——what ? Who can say ? Let us put it thus—to see how they were getting on together.

Sir Harry had received him with a most cordial welcome. He found in him a most agreeable companion, not only for himself, but for Lady Poyntz. He could not, would not, pay much

attention to her—Hilton was able and apparently willing to do so. He knew she had been fond of him, but with that strange unreasoning recklessness which was part of his disease, he, merely because he took a great liking to the man, pressed his friendship on him, and as a matter of course thrust his society on his wife.

The mischief must have begun very soon, probably in the rush and roar and glitter of Châlons, for he got off going to America on the score of his health; and those who knew and loved him best were grieved to see the Hero of Assewal obviously malingering, and getting himself talked of with another man's wife.

The county, as we know, strongly rebelled, but no one dared to speak. Some said that Sir Harry connived at it—others said he was a besotted idiot. The last opinion was more nearly true than the former. Sir Harry's head was going. He began to find that he had not brain to execute the schemes which his cunning had originated. He had early confided what was the matter to Hilton, and Hilton had often acted for him. But something happened once which gave him firmer confidence in Hilton, and which gave Colonel Hilton supreme power over Sir Harry.

Poor Sir Harry began to get into a new phase of his disease. His fits of irritability became more acute, and began to develop into violence. His wife one night irritated him extremely; she had no tact whatever, and he threw something at her. The ridiculous part of the matter was that it was only an anti-macassar; but the pathetic part of it was that the poor fellow had cunning enough to see that he had by that act overstepped a certain boundary, and that he could never step back again. He was on his knees before her directly, and she, not having wit to see, laughed at the whole matter, and threatened to box his ears. He said nothing more to her; but he rode over to Plymouth, and told the whole business to Colonel Hilton.

“If it had been the poker, you know, Hilton, it would have been just the same. And it would be in the highest degree ungentlemanly if I laid my hand on that woman. She hasn't behaved badly, and she brought me, first and last, sixty thousand pounds. It's an awful nuisance, isn't it?”

“Why did you marry, Poyntz?”

“Heaven only knows! Why the deuce did they let me? If they had all done their duty they could have stopped it. My character was bad enough to have justified the county in burning down the Castle.”

“Poyntz, I can’t make head or tail of you; you are the most confusing fellow I ever met.”

“I know I am a disturbing cause among you sane people. You generalise from an accumulation of facts which you consider as sufficient, and then *I* come cranking in, and send your calculations to the four winds of heaven—make you all in your bewilderment a hundred times madder than myself. For instance, *you* are all mops and brooms now. You don’t know what to do—I do. I want watching, and some one ought to watch me; some one I respect and like ought to have his eye on me. If it was only once a week it would be something.”

“Go home and fight against it, man; you have plenty of resolution and plenty of brains, though they are most decidedly addled, God help you! I never saw anything like you in all my born days,” cried the Colonel, in a bewilderment which would have been comical under any other circumstances. “Go home and keep your temper, man.”

“But will you speak to Maria, and persuade her not to exasperate me to the pitch of murder?”

“Well—yes, I will. What did she do to you?”

“She kept on agreeing to every word I said. I tried to make her contradict me for an hour and a half, but she wouldn’t. She sat there smiling, and agreeing with every word I said till I thirsted for her blood, and hurled the antimacassar at her. I talked of everything in heaven or earth. I turned high-churchman and low-churchman, Whig, Tory, doctrinaire Radical, pot-house Radical—pitched into Popery, pitched into Whalley; but there she sat and smiled, and agreed to every word I said, till at last I did what can never be undone—I used violence towards her.”

“You haven’t hurt her much, have you?” said Hilton, laughing.

“Don’t be a fool! If you can’t see the importance of what I have told you, leave us alone!”

So Colonel Hilton thought it his duty to see more of that establishment, as being the only person who had any power over Sir Harry. He made very light of this antimacassar business; Sir Harry was so fantastic about it. A circumstance which happened a few days afterwards showed him that the poor fellow (we may call him so now) was right, and that a strong head was needed in that house.

Sir Harry Poyntz had lately drunk nothing but water; he was a very abstemious man. Therefore one evening, when Colonel Hilton was over at the Castle, he felt no anxiety when he left

Captain Wheaton and Sir Harry alone over the wine (Captain Wheaton drinking like a fish, and Sir Harry eating grapes like a famished hound), and went up to the drawing-room to Lady Poyntz.

He had hardly been there ten minutes, when Wheaton came in, as pale as a ghost, and called on Colonel Hilton to defend him.

Hilton thought he was drunk. "I thought I had—that you were forbidden this room, sir?"

"For God's sake come and help us! Sir Harry is going to murder me; he has gone for his revolver!"

Hilton went at once; from a noise he heard he directed his feet towards Sir Harry's bedroom. There he found three or four servants round the door, begging Sir Harry to be calm; he, in a furious rage, had just finished loading his revolver.

"Now, clear out of the way; I'll shoot the first man who stands between that dog and me!"

All got out of the way except a young footman, who cleverly kept his eye on the pistol, intending to run in at his master. He was just going to make a dart, when he was thrust gently on one side; and Colonel Hilton, walking calmly in, took the pistol away from Sir Harry as if he was a child.

"You can all go. Thomas, you have behaved uncommonly well; Sir Harry will reward you. Now, Poyntz, how did this come about?"

"He was drunk, and he amused himself by irritating and insulting me the moment you were gone."

"Didn't you begin nagging at him?"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you."

"Well, we must take care it don't happen again. You have pretty well frightened him this time."

"He would do it again when he was drunk; we had better kick him out."

"I think that ought to have been done a long while ago; but—I beg your pardon, Poyntz—are you quite sure you mean what you say?"

"Quite sure? Yes."

"You are quite sure the fellow don't know too much—is not dangerous?"

"Oh, dear no; he knows nothing more than you do. I certainly did keep him on, partly because I did not want it known that I was odd in my head; but the main reason was that I liked to tease and insult him, and see how much the dog would stand. As far as I am concerned, kick him out to-night! You are not afraid yourself, are you?" said Sir Harry.

“What should *I* be afraid of? What is the dog to me?”

“He will blacken your character and, I fear, Maria’s too. But anything is better than murder!”

“I will give the rascal a hint of my vengeance if he dares. I will go now and send him off.”

And so Captain Wheaton got what he elegantly called his “walking ticket,” and disappeared. Instantly on his disappearance, rumour got tenfold more busy with Lady Poyntz’s name, with Hilton’s name, and with Sir Harry’s name. Lady Poyntz was an abandoned woman, and gambled; Hilton was lost to all honour, and drank; Sir Harry was abandoned, gambled, drank, and was a dangerous lunatic all at the same time. Of course these reports were set about by our friend Wheaton, but most people believed them; and not long after Wheaton’s departure, Sir Charles Seckerton had the interview we know of with Sir Harry Poyntz, and came home with his feathers ruffled.

Meanwhile Sir Harry clung more and more closely to Hilton, as the only man in this world whom he could trust. And Hilton hung on about the house, and saw more and more of Maria, till now he and Lady Poyntz were standing on the very verge of ruin unutterable.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“DID you see Lady Poyntz this morning, Laura?” asked Lord Hatterleigh, as he and Laura met on the stairs, going down to dinner, and dawdled together for a chat.

“Yes; I saw her and walked with her, but there was no result. She held me completely at bay, and talked and rattled on just as she has done since I went back to her to try to gain her confidence. She is perfectly friendly, but will talk nothing but commonplace. I must give the business up, George.”

“Don’t do that; persevere, my love. Think for a moment what is involved in giving her up.”

“You are right. I will persevere on the mere chance of some accident giving me my old hold on her. George, there was a time when that woman hung on every word I said—when I could have made her jump off the keep or turn Roman Catholic.”

“How did you lose it?”

“You are rather provoking; but I will stick to our bargain,

and tell the truth. Through my own conceit and folly, not to mention my tongue; I bullied her too much."

"And she thought you stood between her and Colonel Hilton at the time you encouraged him to pay you so much attention?"

"If snapping his nose off every time he opened his mouth meant encouragement, you are quite right."

"I know," said Lord Hatterleigh, giving one of his own "Alcedo gigantea" guffaws. "I used to watch you. What on earth made you hate the man so?"

"The same thing which makes me dislike you so much—he is a gaby!"

"I don't think he is a gaby at all—at all events, not such a gaby as I was."

"I never examined into the degrees of gabyism."

"Bless thy sweet tongue, Kate! And you wonder you lost your power over Maria Poyntz?"

"Bless thy sweet temper, George! Did any one ever make you cross? I have tried hard enough."

"No, I never was cross. My mother remarks it in public often—a great deal too often. She damages my reputation, and makes people take liberties with me, but always representing me a lamb. It would do me infinite good in the world if people could be got to believe that I was a terrible tiger at bottom; but they won't. By-the-bye, do you remember that you told me once that the reason you hated Colonel Hilton was that he agreed with every word you said? Now that is singular, isn't it?"

"Come to your dinner, will you, and don't stay exasperating me on the stairs. The cases are utterly different. You contradict me, and argue with me in perfect good-humour; he flattered one until he made one contradict him, and only opposed one when he was thoroughly angry. Now that is quite enough to carry you on for the rest of the evening; I cannot be always flattering you."

"Very well; I can take care of myself."

"They are coming to-night," said Laura.

"Who?"

"The Poyntzes and Colonel Hilton. That is the last civil thing I shall say to-night. As an illustration, you knew who I meant well enough, only for the chance of another spar you pretend you didn't."

They both burst out laughing. There was something very pretty in the friendship between these two. They sparred at times, but Laura always lost. She sometimes lost her temper, for instance, which that sweet-natured gorilla of a nobleman never

did. They did one another a deal of good. She civilised him to an extent which his own mother had never conceived possible; and he, by his persistent good-humour, broke her of her petulance, and cured her of her unfortunate habit of speaking her mind. When on this occasion they had both done laughing, she answered him—

“The Poyntzes and the other gaby—you know whom I mean by the first one—are coming. Now.”

“Pax, be serious! I am in earnest, Laura. I want to speak to you; I want to consult you. There, now let us be wise.”

They were at once as wise as Solomon.

“I wish he was gone from here,” said Lord Hatterleigh.

“We all wish that.”

“If he has a spark of honour or manliness left in him—and the man is a noble soldier, Laura—he will go after hearing to-day’s news.”

“What news?”

“News!” cried Lord Hatterleigh, and looking sternly at her. “Heavens! have you heard nothing?—that India is lost; that the Sepoys have risen, and are driving the British before them like sheep; that the European men and women are being shot down like dogs, and treated worse; that the whole remnant of British rule in India consists in a few hopeless garrisons, shut in, with their women and children, in the principal towns, holding out, through thirst and hunger, lest a fate worse than death befall them? India is lost—gone—hopelessly gone!”

“That is very dreadful, Hatterleigh! Are we really to lose India? But we shall get on pretty well without it, sha’n’t we?”

“Heaven help her!” said Lord Hatterleigh, addressing a case full of stuffed birds, which stood in the hall close before him. “My mother was right; I can’t lose my temper. Laura dear, you can understand this. We have suffered a fearful disaster in India—more fearful, more terrible, than you can understand! I will teach you to understand it, dear, and you shall be as angry and as fierce as I am. But this terrible disaster strikes home here in two ways.”

“As how? I cannot understand.”

“Colonel Hilton’s brother is there in the thick of it. Surely the danger of his only brother, his favourite, will be sufficient to arouse him from this unmanly sloth? Surely he will exchange into some regiment ordered for service, and quit this place for ever?”

“It would be an excellent solution; let us hope so.”

“Then there is Poyntz’s brother Robert. He is in the thick

of it too. Now would be the time for some one to say a kind word for him to his brother, and to reconcile them."

"Is their quarrel very bitter?"

"Very so. He was very wild. There, your mother has rung for dinner; we shall catch it."

"Not we," said Laura, laughing; "my mother never scolds you."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DURING dinner, and after dinner, they talked of only one thing—the Indian Mutiny; and more particularly that part of it which was illustrated by a wonderful letter just received by Sir Peckwich Downes from his son George, who was in the heart of the whole matter.

The party was complete, with the exception of Colonel Hilton, who could not come. Sir Peckwich looked seven sizes larger than usual, and tried to be as pompous as ever, but failed. A radiant genial smile overspread his features continually; and more than once, like our dear Sir Hugh, he manifested a mighty disposition to cry. All the best part of the man (and he was a noble man enough) was coming out of him as he talked of his son's heroism, and his son's friend's heroism. And Lord Hatterleigh and Laura noticed, as a curious thing, that he addressed himself almost entirely to Sir Harry Poyntz, to whom he had hardly deigned to speak before. He appealed to him, and he flattered him: when he told the most exciting part of the noble story, as he did by request half-a-dozen times over, he addressed himself almost entirely to Sir Harry Poyntz. Once, when his utterance was stopped, and his great chest began heaving, he sat calmly looking at Sir Harry, until he had succeeded in smothering the sobs which were trying to rise. And Sir Harry, with his shallow pale-blue eye, sat watching and listening to him with his head on one side, like a parrot. No one but Hilton could have read that intense look: it meant, "My brain is getting dull; but I think I know what you are after, old gentleman!" Lord Hatterleigh couldn't make it out at all.

The gist of the story was this. The garrison of Gorumpore, reduced to about sixty European soldiers, one hundred Sikhs, and the civilian volunteers, had, finding their position untenable, made

a glorious retreat, with the women and children, back in safety to a nucleus of the army, which was now sufficiently large to retreat the next day into communication with the base of operations at Calcutta—and this through masses of swarming Sepoys. You can read a hundred such stories. Their rear had been sorely pressed by rebel cavalry. The handful of mounted Europeans and Sikhs had charged back, against overwhelming superior numbers, time after time through the burning day. At last, at evening, when the main body were just getting into safety, within hearing of British bugles, George Downes, in command of the party, had ordered one last charge. But the rebels, getting more reckless as they saw their prey escaping, were too strong for them—the British got the worst of it. Several of the Sikhs went to Paradise with closed teeth, laying about them like glorious fellows as they are; but the rest cut their way through the rebels, and, led by a certain Cornet, were in a fair way to get home; when this Cornet, now their leader, looking round, missed Downes, and, crying out to the rest of his handful of Sikhs and Europeans, turned bridle and rode back again as hard as he could go.

The main body of the rebels had found themselves too near the British bugles, and had retreated. But in the centre of the plain there were left somewhere near fifty of them, riding round and round one another in a circle—the inner ones of them cutting and slashing at something with their sabres. The Cornet, sailing straight away into this embroglio, never looking as to who were following, and making himself felt right and left, discovered that the something they were cutting at was George Downes, standing, dismounted, over the body of a wounded British trooper, fighting the whole fifty of them single-handed.*

The Cornet dashed at the whole of them alone; and whether it was that he laid about him so stoutly, or whether the mere appearance of “an angry sahib”—which, as Mr. Trevelyan tells us, is sufficient to produce any amount of panic among Indians—caused it, we cannot say: at all events there was a general “skedaddle,” which is one fact; and another is, that we agree with Mr. Trevelyan that an angry Englishman is a very terrible business indeed.

* I have not drawn on my imagination here. I met a quiet man at a country dinner-party, not many years ago, on whose dress-coat I detected the Victoria Cross. In the half-hour before dinner I got introduced to him, for the purpose of having a look at his shabby bit of gun-metal, a decoration which I had never seen closely before. A few years afterwards I saw his sword-arm, and then I began to understand what war meant. He had eight-and-twenty sabre-cuts in various parts of his body.

However, the Cornet and the Cornet's tail got Captain Downes out of his terrible situation in triumph, and that was the story.

"And what I say is," thundered Sir Peckwich Downes, "that nobly as that most noble boy of mine has behaved, the Cornet has behaved more nobly still. Just think of it, by Jove!—coming back after poor George—all alone, single-handed, by Jove! And you talk to me of your ancient Romans," he continued, turning with sudden asperity on Sir Charles, as if that innocent and perfectly silent gentleman had just finished a string of highly offensive classical allusions—"your Quintus Curtius, your Leonidas, your rubbish! What were they to this glorious self-devoted Cornet—eh, sir? Go along with you, sir; don't talk that nonsense to me!"

"A glorious fellow truly," said Sir Charles; "a noble fellow—a hero among heroes!"

"We have not had his name yet," said Laura. "Let us have this noble man's name."

"Ask Sir Harry Poyntz," said Sir Peckwich, with a toss of the head and a puff.

Laura did so, with her eyes flashing, and her whole face animated by the glorious story. Sir Harry looked at her steadily, and thought, "I shall have to play the mischief with you tomorrow, my dear young lady—I shall indeed;" and then said slowly, aloud—"I do not know his name. I know nothing of the story but what I have heard here. But I begin to make a guess, from Sir Peckwich Downes' exceedingly personal gaze, that this hero is no other than that lunatic young rascal, my brother Bob: it's exactly like a piece of his tomfoolery."

"Right, by Jingo!" said Sir Peckwich, bringing his fist on the table with a crash: a piece of vulgarity which, coupled with the lowness of the remark which accompanied it, would at an ordinary time have raised extreme anger in the aristocratic soul of Lady Downes; but she now only sat, flushed and proud, looking so really noble that Laura remarked it, and pointed it out to Lord Hatterleigh.

"Wonderful!" he whispered; "and such a *very* commonplace-looking person on ordinary occasions!"

"We have all got a little extra fire in our eyes to-night—not one of us but looks nobler," said Laura; "but the proud mother beats us all. I wonder whether that strange creature Sir Harry will notice his brother now: he is going to speak."

"It was not a difficult guess of mine, Sir Peckwich. I know now that he must have changed into that Clanjam fry because your son was there. They were boy-lovers at Eton, you remember."

"I congratulate myself on the result," said Peckwich.

"I say," said Sir Harry, with some show of interest, "what does one do in these cases?"

"What do you mean?" said Sir Peckwich, puzzled.

"In these cases, when a man's brother or son distinguishes himself like this: do you send them a present, or merely write them a complimentary letter? What are you going to do in George's case, for instance?"

"I shall write to him, sir, a letter he'll remember to the day of his death. And I shall pay a thousand pounds into Cox and Greenwood's, for him to spend in the way he likes best. That is what I am going to do, sir."

"Oh, indeed! You are going to do that. Should you say that in my case half would be enough?"

"Give me your hand, Poyntz," said Sir Peckwich; and the other did so, laughing.

"Much obliged to you for giving me a precedent. Bob has never done so in his own person. He has never behaved in any way approaching to common decency till now. Here's my difficulty about the letter: all the letters I have ever written to him have been of a violently exasperating and abusive nature, and now to begin gushing——. However, it must be done."

By-and-by a servant came in and announced "Sir Harry Poyntz's boat."

"It is very early," said he.

"I think you are wanted at home, Sir Harry: something about Colonel Hilton."

"Is anything the matter with him?"

"Is he dead?" said Lady Poyntz, in a voice which made them all start.

"No, my lady, I believe not—nothing at all the matter with him."

But she passed out, very pale; and Laura went with her to wrap her up, for the night was chill. Her husband stayed behind, and paused while wishing Lord Hatterleigh good-night. He was a little more fantastic than usual—

"Good-night! I hope you will sleep well to-night."

"Thank you—I generally do, Poyntz—thank you," said Lord Hatterleigh.

"And I hope you will sleep well to-morrow night also. Inside all right now?"

"Quite right, thank you," said the other, laughing.

"Hah! don't let it go wrong again, if anything happens to you. Put a bold face on it, you know. Good-night!"

“Put a bold face on what?” asked Lord Hatterleigh.

“On anything that may happen,” said Sir Harry. “Don’t think so much of your inside. Bless you, there is no greater mistake in life than beginning to study your inside! If I had done so I should have been in Bedlam ten years ago. Short of turning Papist, I know of no superstition so mischievous as that of believing one’s inside to be in an exceptional and abnormal state. That is the great temptation of your life; don’t you yield to it after you get my letter to-morrow.”

At the door Sir Harry came across his wife, Laura, and Sir Charles Seekerton. He bid Laura “good-night,” and paused with her as he had with Lord Hatterleigh.

“That was a fine story about George Downes,” he said.

“A noble story! And your brother too!”

“And my brother Bob, eh? A fine fellow—a fine fellow! I will send him five hundred pounds, and I’ll bet another hundred that he makes that five hundred go further than scatter-brained George Downes does his thousand. A fine fellow Bob, after all, Sir Charles; only one fault, he is such a miserly screw!”

“I can hardly believe that about such a hero,” said Laura.

“You’ll have to believe it, Miss Seekerton. And now, as we shall never meet again in this world, let me say good-bye once more. Reserve your judgment of me; all I ask of you is to reserve your judgment of me.”

And before puzzled Laura had replied, he was down the pleasance-walk after his wife; and soon they heard the throb of the rowlocks, as the boat carried them across the tideway towards the dark Castle which threatened in the westward before the sinking moon. “Seen him for the last time! Reserve her judgment on him! The man was mad!”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was a cold night, and a cold and wailing wind came down the river from the moor; but it was hardly cold enough to account for Lady Poyntz trembling and shivering as she did.

“How you shake, old woman!” said Sir Harry; “you have caught a cold. Take my coat.”

“I am warm enough, Harry; at least I shall get warm walking up to the Castle. I hate dining at the Court! I shall catch

my death crossing this river some night. However, here we are."

She sprang on shore; and the moment they were alone together, she said—

"Hilton has got some ill-news, or he is going to India. Go and speak to him."

"India! For God's sake don't let him go away from me! I shall be ruined. I can't do without him now. I tell you fairly, I have no one who will act for me but him."

"Go to him, Harry; see if anything is wrong."

"I wish you would go," said Sir Harry. "I hate a scene. Besides, you have ten times the influence with him that I have. Do go, to oblige me."

"Let it be so then," she said, with a sigh.

"Thank you! I will go to my room."

Colonel Hilton, the servant said, was in the library. She passed quickly to the door, and paused when she had her hand on the handle.

She felt sick and faint; she was terrified beyond measure. The poor woman knew that, although as yet innocent, she was on the edge of a precipice, and that any movement might be her ruin. What was Hilton doing; why had he sent for them home? She knew, poor creature, that she was in his power; that he had got perfect control over her; and that if he was scoundrel enough to say the word this night, she would follow him to the ends of the earth! She wished she was dead; she wished that she had never been born. At last she said to herself, "Oh, if he will only have mercy!"

She let the handle go. A thought came into her head so maddening, so terrifying, that she nearly screamed aloud. Her father! For one moment in the darkness she saw the dear old face, as it would be when he got the news; incredulity, horror, and a wild grief which was beyond wailing, were torturing every sacred line. The ghastly vision was gone again in an instant; and she stood gasping for breath before the door, knowing that she must enter to her fate.

She was terrified suddenly by a sound in the room, at the door of which she stood trembling: a word—a word in Hilton's voice—a loud, furious, terrible oath! She went in now, and as she looked at him, she thought her doom was sealed.

He was perfectly white, and his hair was disordered, and hung over his forehead. On his face there was a scowl so fearful, so utterly unlike anything she had seen there before, that her terror was almost lost in amazement. He was standing with his back

to the fire and his face towards her as she came in, and so she took it all in at a glance.

“Is that you, Lady Poyntz?” he croaked out.

“Yes, it is I; you sent for us.”

“To hear the news, the gallant news, my Lady Poyntz. Have you heard the news of my brother Jack, of my bonny little Jack, the lad I swore to protect, to my mother on her deathbed? Only he and I left in the world together!”

“Has anything happened to him?”

“Murdered!” he shouted, in a voice which rang through the silent house, and startled the distant servants. “Murdered, foully and cruelly, by his own men, while I, like a thrice-cursed fool, was mincing here! That is brave news for you, my Lady Poyntz!”

She could only weep—she had nothing to say.

“But, Maria, I will have vengeance for this—sweet, noble vengeance! I am off to-night; I only stayed to say good-bye, and before you see me again, I shall have waded knee-deep in blood. Our fellows are at the glorious work now, and I am away to join them. And now good-bye once more, Maria; say good-bye to your husband for me. I have been here too long already.” And so, without another word, he was gone.

A sad frame of mind for such a genial noble creature to find himself in. It is easy enough to be philosophical over this state of feeling, and to be shocked at it at this distance of time. We, however, have nothing to do either with excusing it or condemning it; all we need say about it is that it existed to an immense extent, and that its existence in the breast of Colonel Hilton probably saved him and Lady Poyntz from hopeless ruin.

She was saved, and she knew it. Half an hour after Hilton was gone, her husband, prowling round the house with catlike tread, came to the library-door and looked in. Lady Poyntz was kneeling at the table, with the light in her face, and her hands held before as though she prayed; while her lips, though moving rapidly, did not disturb the beautiful smile which was settled on her mouth. She had not been weeping, for her magnificent lustrous eyes were as clear and more brilliant than ever; but what was more noticeable than anything, was a look of unutterable joy which overspread her face, and had its origin in too many infinitely intricate sources for it to be possible to analyse it, or to say it was expressed so, or so. There was something so solemnly beautiful about her, that Sir Harry drew back, and looked on puzzled—

“How wonderfully beautiful she looks! Why is she glad

Hilton is gone? I hope I have not been too careless. She is looking like her dead mother now. I never saw her mother, but I know she is. Well, it is no good trying to get her to help me in this business while she is in this saintlike frame of mind; I might as well ask that Madonna there. I see I must do it all myself."

And so with catlike stealth he crept away through the silent house, and left her kneeling with her hands before her, indulging the long-lost but newly-found luxury of prayer.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LORD HATTERLEIGH came over earlier than usual the next morning. Laura heard his horse come to the hall door, and heard him come rattling along to the door of the breakfast-room, where she sat alone. She thought he was in a great hurry, but until he had shut the door behind him took very little notice. When he had done so she looked up, and was filled with astonishment and fear.

Poor gentleman, he was a sad spectacle! He looked pale and wild, and, what was more extraordinary, all the latent "Guy" element in the man had come out stronger than ever, as the Doctor said it would on the first strain of circumstances. He had got his hat on the back of his head, his necktie was on one side, and one of his shoe-strings was untied. Laura saw that something had happened, but she preserved her equanimity, for she had really no anticipation of anything overwhelming. She spoke first—

"What is the matter, George?"

"Oh, Laura! Laura! I have got such a dreadful letter."

"Is that any reason why you should keep your hat on, not to say wear it on the back of your head, like a lunatic? Sit down, and tell me all about it."

"I hardly know where to begin," said poor Lord Hatterleigh, sitting down.

"Begin anywhere; and as for leaving off, leave off as soon as I order you."

It was the last piece of her kindly shrewishness which she ever gave to him or any one else. Lord Hatterleigh saw the old effort to be smart and epigrammatical, and saw the failure also. She

was frightened. He paused before he went on, and there was a dead silence. She would not speak, and he was forced to begin. He sat, and looked steadily and kindly at her, and began speaking. She thought he had never looked so manly, so noble, or so good as he looked now, when every word he spoke was like a dull blow on her heart, which by God's mercy deadened its sensation, and prevented her going mad.

"Laura," he said, "do you remember once that you turned to me suddenly, when I, to tell the truth, was not prepared for your doing so; when I, in fact, was only hoping that you could get to love me after getting used to my uncouthness, and finding out by degrees my better qualities; you remember that at such a time once you turned to me spontaneously, and told me that you had always liked me and trusted me?"

"I went further than that. I said I had always loved you; and so I always did, and so I always shall in a sort of way. I always laughed at you, and, unless my heart is broken and the wells of laughter get dry, I always shall whenever you are ridiculous. I would laugh at you now if you were not so serious. Go on."

"Do you remember that you said to me on that occasion, that you had no one left whom you could trust to but me; and, moreover, that I gave you my knightly word of honour, as a Peer of Great Britain, that whatever happened would make no difference to me—that I would stand by your side and see you through it?"

"I remember all that. Go on."

"Now I wish, before you see this letter, to renew that vow, and to tell you that this letter makes no difference to me; that I swear by my title, by my position, by my sixty-thousand a-year, that no cloud shall come between me and you! Will you read it?"

"I had better. I would have made you a shrewish joke about the absurdity of your swearing by your income, but I fear I shall make few more jokes in this world. Give it to me; and give me one kiss, George, before I read it."

He tried to kneel to her, but she would not have it. "We must be very cool over this matter," she said. "If we were only Jemmy and Jessamy it would be different. You are Lord Hatterleigh, and I am Laura Seckerton. Now for the letter; I suppose the signature is Harry Poyntz."

Lord Hatterleigh gave it to her without a word. It was infinitely worse than she had anticipated; there was ruin in the first two lines of it. She had often laughed to herself at the idea

of her, with her secret, being received into the bosom of a family so rampantly offensively particular as that of the Hatterleighs, and she had lately determined that it would not do. She knew that she loved the dead Poyntz-Hammersley still : and her plan had been to keep Lord Hatterleigh dangling after her, nominally engaged to her ; to form him as well as she was able, to cure him of his Guy Fawkes habits, and so by degrees show him that their engagement was only a thing of words ; to quietly dismiss him as soon as an eligible young lady appeared in the field, and to keep up a platonic friendship with him for the rest of her life, while she herself went into the high-church nursing-sisterhood business. That was her programme—not a bad one if that unaccountable bedlamite Sir Harry Poyntz had not drawn a wet sponge through the whole matter. As she read his letter to Lord Hatterleigh, she saw that her engagement to him must come to an end at once ; and, what was more, that there was left, over and above, a frightful personal scandal against herself. She had not read three sentences of it before she looked up at Lord Hatterleigh, and said—

“ I wonder why he did this. I cannot conceive what his motive can be. But a lunatic has no motives. Perhaps it is better that he has done it.” And then she went on, finished it, folded it up, and gave it back to Lord Hatterleigh, with a sigh, saying : “ Well, that’s all over ! ”

The letter was as follows :—

“ MY DEAR HATTERLEIGH,—I have been waiting for some one else to perform this exceedingly unpleasant task, but as no one seems inclined to do it, I must open your eyes myself.

“ Miss Seckerton’s close intimacy with young Hammersley—a noble young fellow, certainly, but only huntsman, or something of that kind, to her father—renders it impossible and ridiculous for her to become your Countess.

“ One particular and private meeting which took place in my shrubberies was witnessed. The indiscretion in this particular instance will, I suppose, accomplish my object.

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ HARRY POYNTZ.”

“ And what do you think of that for a false villain ? ” said Lord Hatterleigh. “ You must commission me to go to him and give him the lie to his face ! ”

“ I can’t do that ; it is all true enough,” she said, wearily.

“ All true enough ! ” he cried, aghast.

“ All true enough to ruin me, I mean,” she said ; “ though of course, my Lord,” she added, suddenly and fiercely, “ you understand that I acted with the most perfect discretion throughout the business.”

“ Of course you did. Did you dream that I distrusted you ? ” Lord Hatterleigh answered, proudly. “ I only ask you to explain so far as to enable me to go and tell that villain he lies in his throat—not a word more than that ! ”

She liked him better now she had lost him than she had ever liked him before. She had intended to break off her engagement ; Sir Harry Poyntz had done it for her, and ruined her besides. The world seemed all such a ghastly, weary waste ! Only one hand seemed held out to her, and she was going to cast that hand away—

“ I can give you no explanations. As he has put the matter it is utterly false, but I am wearied of the subject, and it is hateful to me. Our engagement is at an end ! ”

“ It is nothing of the kind ; I will not have it so for an instant.”

“ Do not you see that it is wholly impossible for you to continue it if I refuse you those explanations ? And I do refuse them. Here is your ring.”

“ Laura, one moment before it is too late——”

“ Not another word until you have taken your ring.”

He was forced to take it, and said, “ What have I left to live for now ? ”

“ Much,” she answered. “ Now we can talk as friends. You have me to live for ; I am in want of a friend.”

The poor gentleman did not accept his position at all kindly, but sat ruefully silent.

“ I can speak no more on the subject this morning,” she said ; “ I am ill. Go away now. What can I have done to make Sir Harry Poyntz use me so cruelly ? ”

She said this as she passed out, and said it in such a pitiable tone, that it went to Lord Hatterleigh’s heart. He thought a few minutes, and then hurled himself down the stairs out of the room, across the hall, and out of the house. “ Send my horse and groom after me ” was all he said to the wondering butler, and strode away gesticulating across the park.

CHAPTER XL.

LADY EMILY and her mother sat alone in the library, no more suspecting that there was anything wrong in their domestic affairs, than believing that the granite tors of the moor were breaking from their bases, and coming crashing about their heads. They had never had a hint of Sir Charles' difficulties; and he used to see them day after day utterly unconscious, cheerful, and peaceful, in a circle of circumstances, which to them appeared a well-kept English gentleman's establishment, but which to him seemed only a ghastly heap of fraudulent bankruptcy and ruin.

They were talking, as they always were now, of Laura's approaching marriage, and were indeed getting busy about it. It was very charming to Lady Emily to have the management of such a great affair, and not less pleasant for her mother to be consulted (as she was a hundred times a-day) on every detail, and not only consulted but implicitly followed. The presents were dropping in. The Downes' only the day before had sent in a magnificently ostentatious offering from Howell and James, and there it stood; even Lady Downes' and Constance Downes' comparatively humble contributions towering above all the others on the table, while Sir Peckwich himself was represented by an almost offensively beautiful centrepiece for flowers, which, like Sir Peckwich himself, was head and shoulders higher than the other two.

"I hear Laura's footstep: she is coming to look at the Downes' presents."

If she had made strange preparations for doing so. It would seem much more likely that she had been getting herself ready to act the part of "Medea." She was deadly, ghastly pale, and somehow—perhaps by some frenzied motion of her body, perhaps by the mere clasping of her hands to her heated head—one large band of her hair had come down and hung across her face. She was very calm, and her mouth was set firmly; but the instant the two ladies looked at her, they saw plainly enough that she would never be Countess of Hatterleigh.

"I am come to tell you both that I have broken off my engagement with Lord Hatterleigh, in a manner which renders all reconsideration impossible. Will you tell people about it for me, and all that sort of thing? I am very tired, and am unable to speak any more on the subject."

"If Lord Hatterleigh has dared——" began Lady Emily.

“ Lord Hatterleigh has not dared anything, my dearest mother ! The whole thing is of my doing—my fault from beginning to end. Lord Hatterleigh has behaved like a very noble and true-hearted gentleman, and has left me very unwillingly.”

Lady Emily immediately went down on her knees. “ Laura,” she said, “ let your own mother on her bended knees implore you to say the one word to that unhappy young man, which will bring him back to your side, and save us from the intolerable ridicule which always attaches to the breaking-off a match when it has gone as far as this one has ! ”

“ Mother, get up.”

“ I know this is your doing. I know that Hatterleigh was too infatuated—loved you too dearly. Oh, say the word—oh, say the word, and save us ! ”

“ Mother, I think I can bear what I have to bear. You may make it harder for me by these scenes, but I will try. I wish you to understand, once for all, that it is all over between us, and that no power on earth can ever make me alter my decision.”

She left the room ; and Lady Emily, getting up from her knees—by no means so easy a process as going down on them—turned to her mother, and said, “ Here is a pretty business ! ”

“ I never thought it would do,” said Lady Southmolton.

“ I am aware of that, my dear mother ; I have heard that before,” replied Lady Emily, with perfect truth, but with more tartness than was necessary. “ The question is, ‘ what is to be done ? ’ ”

“ Nothing, that I am aware of, except writing to Jane Clark.”

“ Jane Clark is dead,” said Lady Emily, still snappishly. “ Do you mean to advise me to sit down under this ? ”

“ Whether I advise you to do so or not, my dear Emily, you will have to do so. You had better stop any further expense.”

“ The milliner will put it all about London.”

“ Not she : a hundred others will have done it for her,” said Lady Southmolton, who had never been spoken to sharply by her daughter before, and had no idea of standing it.

“ It is so sudden,” said Lady Emily ; and we have had it talked about so much. It was in the *Post*.”

“ It is the most sudden and scandalous business I have ever had to do with,” replied her mother. “ I thought I could have crept to my grave without being mixed up in a business of this kind. But I will not complain ; I will bear my cross, Emily.”

“ You seem bent on driving me out of my mind, mother. Will you tell me what to do ? ”

“ With the greatest pleasure. Was her veil ordered ? ”

“ You know it was.”

“ Then you must compromise. The milliner is a most excellent woman, and will let you off your bargain far cheaper than Madame Mantalini would ; but I should tell her all the circumstances of the case, out of mere courtesy. Then you must write to Gunter and tell him all about it ; say you don't want the cake. Then you will have to tell Harry Emmanuel about it, and so on.”

“ Mother ! mother ! why are you so cruel ? ”

“ Because I am angry with you, Emily ! ” said the little old lady, stamping her foot upon the floor. “ Would you have dared to rebel against *me* in this manner ? Why don't you do your duty as a mother, and send for Lord Hatterleigh yourself ? Why do you allow Laura to dictate to you in this shameful way ? Order Laura to her room, and sit down and write to Lord Hatterleigh yourself.” (The little old lady had shaken and wagged her head, and stamped her foot so much by now, that she might almost have frightened a rabbit). “ Do you think that at Laura's age I should have so far forgotten every moral and religious duty as to allow you for one instant to behave as Laura is behaving now ? Never ! ”

“ I know you would not, mother. But I am afraid of Laura ; I dare not speak to her ! ”

Old Lady Southmolton was so filled with unutterable contempt by this expression of weakness, that she had nothing to say. She looked up to heaven as though praying for patience.

“ Do speak to her yourself, mother, and make her obey you,” said poor Lady Emily.

At this very alarming proposition, Lady Southmolton came back to earth again with the most startling rapidity ; she actually tumbled down, headlong. Her first act on arriving on this earth, after a serene contemplation of the deterioration of the human species since the days of Hannah More—after falling suddenly, from a height of moral speculation, down on to the floor of extremely disagreeable personal practice—was, so to speak, to sit up and look round her, to see if her daughter was in earnest, or was daring to make game of her. Poor Lady Emily was perfectly in earnest—there was no doubt in that. Lady Southmolton said, quietly scornful—

“ She is not *my* daughter ; she is yours. I am not her mother, any more than my sainted Southmolton was her father. I wash my hands of her ! Do not drive me to say that I wash my hands of you—of my own daughter ! ”

The idea of Lady Southmolton washing her hands of her was so dreadful to Lady Emily, that she went through the action of

washing her own, and moaned and wailed herself into silence, as ladies do in such cases. When everything had been quite quiet for a quarter of an hour, from Lady Emily's last sob, Lady Southmolton, solemnly but on the whole in a conciliatory manner, said—

“Emily!”

Lady Emily threw herself on her mother's bosom, and went through the sobbing business again—but three octaves lower, and many minutes shorter; after which they talked together in a reasonable manner. But all that they arrived at was that girls were not as they used to be, and that dear Laura was very strange; that, on the whole, they—they—were both horribly afraid of her, could not in the least degree calculate what she would do next, and so had better leave her to herself: which they did.

CHAPTER XLI.

SIR HARRY POYNTZ was sitting at his library-table turning over his papers. This became day after day a more difficult and tiresome business for him. He knew that his brain was softening, and he had submitted to his fate in that matter with that quaint godless fatalism which possibly was part of his disease. He had told Hilton that the only thing which annoyed him was, that those fits of irritability were beyond his control. He said, in his queer way, that it was so unutterably exasperating to find that he couldn't keep his temper. But these fits had grown milder as the disease went on, and had altogether ceased; but as they ceased a new cause of irritation seemed arising. He had always been the most methodical as well as the most catlike cleanly of men, and now he began to find that his papers got wrong, and that he was getting untidy in his dress. This vexed him considerably.

He was in a mess with his papers this morning. He had found himself getting angry, and, being fearful of one of his old fits of fury coming on, had dismissed the steward with a sweet smile, on pretence of a headache. He had made an effort to bring his mind to a focus, and to get his papers in order; but he found that the effort was beyond him—and there was no one to help him.

“The game is very nearly up,” he thought; “I wish Bob was here.”

Suddenly there came, as there will in such cases, a sudden

activity of brain, a more rapid passage of blood, or if not that something else. He suddenly saw, in one instant, that he was all alone, without a single friend in this world, and utterly without hope or belief in the next. The first effect of this flash of intelligence was infinitely mournful—the second most ghastly and most horrible. There came on him, for one moment, that sense of illimitable distance from others, which no man can feel for many seconds and keep his reason. The nightmare passed away, and left him sitting there, careless, stupid, and desperate.

When the brain quickened again, he began thinking about his brother Robert, and wishing that he would come back, and that he might hear that Robert had forgiven him from his own lips. He did not acknowledge to himself that he had been to blame in their life-long quarrel; he only wished that Robert would tell him they were good friends. "I wish we could start afresh. How was I to know that Bob was a hero? I suppose," went on the poor fellow, "that I must be wrong. Every one loved him, and every one hated me. Why did he always hate and despise me so? Why did he irritate me, and make me hate him! Well, Master Bob, I have brains enough to be even with you yet!"

Some one laid a light hand on his shoulder. He said, "Bob, I'll be even with you. You'll be devilish sorry for me when I am gone." And then he looked up and found his wife standing over him.

"Maria, I am glad to see you; I have had the nightmare. Do *you* wish me dead?"

"Harry! Harry! give up talking so wildly."

"I am not talking wildly at all. Maria, do you think, for the short time we have left to live together, that you could be friends with me? It is so horrible to die without one single friend!"

"I will be a faithful and good wife to you, Harry. We have both made a mistake. You have so often and, let me say, so coarsely put that before me, times innumerable, that I have no delicacy in speaking about it. I have been saved from unutterable woe by God's providence, and my heart is tender towards you, my poor Harry—very tender! Why are you so hopelessly wicked as to make it impossible for me to love you?"

"What have I been doing so unutterably wicked lately?"

"Harry, why have you ruined Laura Seckerton? Why did you write that horrible letter? I have just been with her; she seems the same to the world, but you have driven her half-mad. We have come together again after all our misunderstanding, and I tell you, Harry, that she is broken-hearted."

"Serve her right!" said Sir Harry Poyntz, laughing; "she

wanted a lesson. Let her keep her tongue between her teeth another time."

Maria was so exasperated by this brutality that she rose up, and paced up and down the room in furious heat, denouncing him. There was nothing she did not say of him. When she had somewhat cooled, she, in a very imperial manner, without in the least degree thinking what she was about, declared she would live with him no longer, and formally demanded a separation. Meanwhile Sir Harry laughed louder and louder as she went on, which, however she might conceal it, drove her nearly wild.

"Separation!" he said at last, amidst his laughter. "Why, Sir Charles Seckerton came over here once to represent to me your goings-on with Hilton. I knew and trusted *you*, Maria, and I sent him back shorn. Come, Maria, be sensible; come and hear all about it. Let us have no nonsense."

Poor Lady Poyntz had nothing more to say. She was obliged to listen, however indignantly; innocent as she was, she was obliged to be calm. She came and sat down beside him.

"Maria," he said, "I did write that letter."

"No one doubts it; you signed your name to it. I came in here to-night in a softened mood, to behave as a wife to you; and you, by your hopeless wickedness, have exasperated me to that extent that I have utterly lost my temper with you. Why have you ruined Laura?"

"You mean, why have I broken off her engagement to that Guy Fawkes booby, Hatterleigh?"

"You may put it as you will. Why have you involved her name with Hammersley, sir?"

"Because," said Sir Harry, calmly, "I want her to marry my brother Bob. I have bought up every mortgage on that estate, and I could sell Sir Charles up to-morrow. By my arrangements, Laura, with her damaged reputation——"

"Her damaged reputation, sir!" blazed out Lady Poyntz. "How dare you, sir?"

"I am aware of her perfect discretion, but I was not speaking of that; I was speaking of her reputation. With her reputation she will be glad to marry Bob, and the two estates will be joined, you see; and her father's creditor will be his own son-in-law, and they will all live happy for the rest of their lives."

"It is a cunning scheme," she said, "and I so far like your part in it as to see that you mean well by your brother. But you little know Laura; she would sooner be burnt alive than marry a man under such circumstances."

"But I have put her reputation at zero; I have told

others about it. I tell you she will be glad to marry any one."

"I have no patience with you! You have ruined her for nothing. All she will do will be to go into a convent."

"I thought she was a sound churchwoman."

"A desperate woman soon gets over a few little difficulties of creed. Besides, another thing will show you the absolute folly of your plan. Your brother Robert—he—this heroic man, with all the pride and bloom of his heroism fresh upon him, is to marry this woman, whose reputation you have so carefully undermined. You have gone muddling and scheming on, until you have done irreparable mischief, and ruined a noble woman."

She turned and left him in indignation, and looked back after she passed the door. Sir Harry was looking at her with a half-silly, half-sly expression, and was laughing at her. There was more about him than she could understand. She was sorry to have lost her temper with him, and she went back and kissed him. After that she passed out, and left him sitting in his chair.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE next morning Laura had risen early, had taken her sketch-book, put some food in her hunting-canteen, and walked away alone through the park to the Vicarage.

The Vicar was away that morning—she knew that well enough; but she only wanted the Vicar's wife, whom she found alone.

"I only want the key of the church."

Mrs. Vicar hardly spoke, but seemed to think the more. She had actually given the key to Laura, and Laura was turning away, when the two scarlet gloves were whipped suddenly round her neck; and she found herself violently kissed, and the next instant "The Umbrella" was standing before her, flourishing a scarlet fist within an inch of her nose.

"Oh, if I only had the trouncing of some of them! Oh, if I could get Tom Downes to play Benedict to a certain gentleman's Claudio!"

"Hush! hush!" said Laura; "there is no one to blame. Just think of what you are saying; how very dreadful!"

"I am not an image," said the Vicar's wife. "I am not a

stone gargoyle, to have a mouth and never speak. I am furious, I tell you."

"Quiet—quiet, old friend," said Laura; "you should help me to be quiet, and not make me angry."

"I should, but I can't," said she of the red gloves. "Oh, Laura, if I only had Lord Hatterleigh here!"

"What would you do with him?"

"I would give him such a piece of my mind. Oh, Laura, they have used you so shamefully!"

"Indeed, my dear, I cannot see that at all. In the first place, Lord Hatterleigh: Do you know that I might be Lady Hatterleigh now, in spite of all that has passed, and rule him with a rod of iron? Do you know that Lord Hatterleigh is the most perfect gentleman and the most highminded man I have ever met? My dear soul, I have committed an indiscretion, and am suffering for it—that is all!"

"There is a villain somewhere, Laura."

"I don't see why Sir Harry Poyntz should have been so cruel. But it is all for the best."

"Why are you going into the church?"

"To practise the organ. All my old habits are cut away. I will not ride again. I cannot look at the poor people; they *will* sympathise with me, and I cannot cure them of it; and I won't be sympathised with. They have no manners, those poor folks. And the regulation of hours of business won't do now. Your husband and my grandmother would recommend it, I know, but it won't do; I have got the 'snatches' on me too strong for that. And I have tried to paint, but—but what is the use of losing your temper over a thing of that kind?—and so it is all gone but my most wickedly-neglected music, and I am going to try that; therefore give me the key, and I will call at the school for a boy to blow, and I will see what that will do."

And so she went; and she of the red gloves said to herself—"They have played old gooseberry with a very fine girl among them. Why," she said indignantly to the ambient air, as if the very winds of heaven were to blame, "there wasn't a finer girl than that in the Three Kingdoms! What have you been doing with her, you two old trots" (which was personal), "and you extravagant old zany in topboots?" (which was more personal still). "I wish I had the trouncing of you! Got nothing left but the organ, and can't play that! If I was her I'd go to Rome, out of sheer spite; that would be the way to exasperate them."

If the Vicar could only have heard her! But he was away at

Exeter at the Visitation. They called her, in joke, "The Umbrella," partly from her figure, and partly from her inanimate submission to her husband. She let him do as he would with her; the red gloves were a case in point. But sometimes, to every one's astonishment and confusion, "The Umbrella," so to speak, put herself up, and refused to be got through narrow high-church passages and doorways after her husband, or to be put down again—a most obstinate old umbrella with a very rusty spring.

Laura, laughing to herself, went into the church; and soon afterwards the boy came, and she began playing. The church was very dear to her, and she wished to get back once more into the old church-routine. Nothing had ever satisfied her so well as that, after all. As for communicating—as for returning to the old pretty woman's ministrations (in the way of ornament, and so on, about the altar), that was impossible to her. There was a vindictive chord in her heart, which was vibrated twenty times a day; and at every vibration she said, "Oh, if I had a brother." The old church-peace was not attainable, now that she had fully put before herself her utter exasperation against Sir Harry Poyntz. He came to church, and she could not kneel and pray with him. She hated him, and she did not in the least conceal it from herself. He had gratuitously ruined her, and she hated him!

She had tried all her old round of duties and pleasures, and they were all dead and dull. She had a fancy to shut herself up in the old church and play the organ—to take once again to her long-neglected music. The poor girl was hunted and ill-used, and she had nothing else to look to. "I will practice, and then I can play on Sundays, and so have some part in the worship; and I can sit here behind the curtain, and *see* them communicating. It is better than nothing."

So she in her Galilee. She was not very clever, or very devout, or very sentimental; but she was very truthful, very brave, and surely as hard beset as a woman need be. The chords all went wrong: her hands had got strong enough with her riding to grip any keys ever made, but she had lost the fingering of the keys, and the trick of the stops, and what-not; and she could get no harmony out of the old instrument, which she had heard sounding so sweetly under other hands. Her foolish fancy of speaking her sorrows by the organ to those of the congregation who still dared approach the altar was gone; even this quaint fancy, her last hope, was unattainable. There was no resource left. She sent away the boy who blew the bellows, and began to cry. It is hard

to laugh at an utterly lone woman crying over the keys of an organ. I cannot, and I am quite sure that you cannot either.

To find her father beside her was no surprise. She only said, in a low, indignant, almost objurgative tone, "I have forgotten my music, now I wanted to play for them in church. But I can't play—I have lost everything. I have behaved so well, too. What have I done that I should be treated so? I have told Hatterleigh everything, and he would have me now if I had not been so honest as to refuse him. What have I done to Harry Poyntz that he should ruin my character?"

"Laura," said her father, "Harry Poyntz is dead!"

"What!" she cried, starting up and looking at him. "Come out of this place; let me hear no more here. Come into the churchyard—no, not in the churchyard, out on to the mill-green. Dead is he? Who has killed him? Oh, father! father! there has been nothing between him and Hatterleigh?"

Her father looked surprised, but went on—

"He was found dead. Lady Poyntz had left him sitting in his chair, and soon after the servant brought him a letter which a man on horseback had brought over from Plymouth. Harry went and lay on the sofa to read it, and very soon after the man heard him laughing uproariously. He laughed so loud and so long that the servant feared he would hurt himself. At last he was silent, and silent so long that the servant went back——"

"Well," said Laura.

"He was quite dead, my love. He had gone off with a spasm of the heart, perhaps brought on by his laughter—a strange end to a strange life!"

"Oh, may God have mercy on him!" said Laura. "Oh, Harry! Harry! I forgive you so heartily."

"They sent for me early this morning, and among other things showed me the letter which had caused the poor fellow such amusement. It was from Hatterleigh. He called Harry liar and coward, and informed him that he waited for him at Dessin's, at Calais, with a friend."

"And he only laughed at it! You see that he died in charity with him, at all events. Poor fellow, what could I have done to make him use me so?"

"Laura," answered her father, "it is time you knew the reasons for his line of action. He had set his heart on your marriage with his brother Robert, and the union of the two estates."

"How did he dare——! I forgot. But he must have been mad, for I never saw the man, and the man never saw me."

“ I am aware of that ; but Harry has broached the idea to him, and he has taken most kindly to it. In fact, there is nothing whatever to prevent you becoming Lady Poyntz, if you feel any inclination for such an honour.”

“ Oh, father ! father ! how utterly you would despise me if I did so ! ”

“ I really *cannot* see why,” he angrily broke out ; “ I really, God grant me patience, can—not. It is high time you were settled in life—you must be aware of it. We have none of us said a word to you about your behaviour to Hatterleigh. You might have had him and his sixty thousand a-year back by saying one word, and you wouldn’t say it. I don’t believe you would say it to save your old father from ruin. Now I tell you once for all, that if Sir Robert makes you the subject of this magnificent offer, and you refuse him on sentimental grounds, it will materially alter the relations between yourself and the rest of your family.”

Laura had become very pale, but her heart was going fast and furious.

“ Now look here,” she said, turning to her father and forcing him to look at her ; “ you talk about altered relations. They are altered—they have long been altered. And as for this Sir Robert Poyntz, I would not marry a royal person on such terms. Who is he that he DARE make me a part of one of his schemes for increasing his estate, the least important element in which seems to be considered my consent to marry him ? It is monstrous—the whole of it—monstrous ! ”

Poor Sir Charles was now driven to despair, and spoke as a desperate man, lost to sense of shame, but with a dim hope of his object beyond a sea of degradation, and determined to plunge in and wade through. As he went on, Laura was shocked and frightened to see how his nature had given way under the wear-and-tear of concealed difficulties, and that the best half of it seemed to have disappeared. She remembered a noble, grand, upright gentleman—the worthy magistrate, the generous patron, the courteous host, the wise friend—whom she had loved and called “ Father ; ” she saw before her a miserable, bent, selfish old man, unable to look his daughter in the face, who went through his wretched part with the air and the whine of a begging-letter writer.

“ Laura, I must tell you at once that, if we cannot make this arrangement with him, your poor unhappy old father is ruined ! ”

“ Ruined ! ”

“ Ruined utterly ! Our existence in this place has been a fiction for a year or two past. Sir Harry Poyntz spared me in

hopes of executing his darling scheme. If we disappoint this man, there is no hope whatever ! ”

“ Let me sit down,” she said—“ I cannot stand any longer ; ” and she sat down on the root of a tree, and heard him go on.

“ He is my only creditor ; the arrangement would be actually perfect in every way. I would give up the hounds, if he insisted on it. Nothing stands in the way but yourself. And what is all that your poor father asks of you ? To make one of the finest matches in England, and save a father from ruin ! ”

“ Cannot we do anything ? Is there no hope elsewhere ? ”

“ None ! ”

“ Has grandma no money she can lend you ? ”

“ She has twenty thousand pounds, and I want eighty thousand,” said Sir Charles, curtly.

“ But other people get ruined. I should not mind it except for you. And I would take such care of you, and work for you— Believe me, father, we might be quite as happy without all these miserable superfluities ! Dear father, do think——”

“ You speak like a child, my poor Laura ! There is one other point which you force me to mention, though I would rather have avoided it. With this ruin will come disgrace ! ”

“ Disgrace ! what disgrace ? ” asked Laura.

“ You may spare your father, Laura. It is hard to have to make the confession—spare me the details. It should be enough for you to know that it is disgrace so deep that none of our name could survive it. Now you know all ! ”

She sat perfectly silent for a long while ; he could not tell whether she had yielded or not. When she spoke at last her voice was changed, and she spoke in a hard resolute tone. She rose, too, without any help, and seemed perfectly firm—

“ We will talk no more of this ; the subject is distasteful. I suppose Sir Robert Poyntz will have the tact and propriety to behave as if he knew nothing about these arrangements ; and I hope that a proper time will be allowed to elapse. Now I will go and look at the church. I think I should prefer to walk home alone, please.”

So she went back towards the church ; and, when she came to the gate, turned and saw him walking away, with bowed head, under the shadow of the elms.

“ I *must* save him,” she said to herself ; “ and what is more, I must not think, or I shall go mad. I only want a little more hardening, and it will come easy enough. I must be as Maria was when she married poor Harry—if I can. She might help me, but she is so strangely changed and softened—— I must go

through it by myself. I must become desperate, lest my father's blood should lie at my door."

She was alone, desperate and forlorn; the dead, so much happier than she, lay all around her, and she envied them. She sat on one of the green mounds, and thought of her position.

"I would have been so good if Hammersley had never come" (for she was getting desperate, taking leave of her better self for ever, and concealed nothing), "but he came and spoilt it all, and ruined everything. And I know now that I love him still as well as ever, and should have done poor Lord Hatterleigh a wrong. I saw that after I broke with him. And I put all thoughts of him aside so loyally while I was engaged to George, and only thought of him again when I was free; I thought they might have left me alone, and not driven me to this pass. I am sure I don't want to accuse anybody; but why has my father gone on with this selfish ostentation until he is obliged to sacrifice the creature he loves best in the world—to put on his own dear daughter's face a brazen defiant look, which she must wear till her death? And my mother and my grandmother, how much do they know of this horrible business of my father's ruin? They will stroke my hair and praise me for being dutiful, while I am getting hardened and desperate. I shall have to dress and to flaunt it out. I can stare down Constance Downes, but I can never face Maria Poyntz in her new mood. I shall die if that woman turns her great eyes on me. She has been through it all, and has come out again with a face like a saint; and I, who was so bitter and harsh with her, must go through it all, with those eyes of hers eating into my soul. I wish I was dead—I do wish I was dead!"

She rose up and went into the church, and looked round. Their seat (Sir Charles was lay impropriator) was in the chancel; but she would not enter what was to her, in her belief, the more sacred part of the church—she thought herself unworthy. She went round the building, and wished the dear old place good-bye. She had always loved the church from childhood, as a solemn peaceful place, which seemed to hold the very presence of God. She had sat there year after year, under long weary services and dull weary sermons, with the sunlight sloping on the tombs, and glimpses of the wild moor—the fairyland of her childhood—seen through the windows; building fancies about the dead Poyntzes, Seckertons, and Downes's, whose effigies crowded the chancel; and since the Vicar had come, she had got to love it better still. In spite of all his fantastic ritualisms, the man knew what a church was originally designed to mean, and had taught it to her. Then she had taken a new delight in it—had decorated it with a

wilderness of glowing flowers at Easter, and carefully-woven patterns of box and holly at Christmas, believing that she was doing good service the while. Now the hard world had come crashing in, and had thrown down her dear loved images. All that was passed and gone, and could never come back again; but the remembrance of those times was most melancholy and most pleasant. She took one last farewell of the old place, put on her new look as well as she could, locked the door, and passed out of the porch—

To meet the Vicar leaning against a grave-stone: who said, looking keenly at her—

“You are at your old pious duties, I see?”

To whom Laura, trying to look hardened and worldly, answered, “Not at all; I was taking my farewell of the church. I thought you were away.”

“So I was, but I am at home now. My wife told me you were here. Have you been saying farewell to the church? Are you not coming to church any more, then?”

“I suppose I may,” said Laura.

“You suppose you may?” said the Vicar. “To-morrow is the Feast of St. Ebba of Moorwinstow. Are you coming to-morrow?”

“No, I am not,” said Laura.

“Are you coming to confession this week—eh?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then are you coming to church on Sunday?” asked the Vicar. “I would if I was you: every one does.”

“I may or I may not—I am not well—most probably not.”

“I think I shall see you at church on Sunday,” said the Vicar.

“I say, Laura, don’t be down-hearted over this business.”

“What business?”

“This business; you know what I mean.”

He looked so good, and so kind, and so little *prêtre*, that she felt very much inclined to melt, and tell him everything. But it would never do to begin like that. She put on the new and hitherto unsuccessful hard look again, and said—

“I cannot be expected to understand you, Vicar.”

He laughed—a right jolly laugh too, and said—

“Have you heard the news?”

“What news can matter to me?”

“None, of course; but I will tell it. Sir Robert Poyntz has arrived at the Castle.”

She saw he knew all. In trying to tell him how cruel she thought him—in trying to tell him that it was mean in him to

laugh at her, she broke down, and bursting into tears left him standing where he was.

“Poor child,” he said, as he looked after her, “she has been hardly tried! But it will do her good—and God has been very merciful to her. Many a woman has had her heart broken for less before now. Well, let her go; I really can’t pity her so very much.”

The Vicar took a turn round the churchyard, and stopped against Hammersley’s tablet, and said, “Hum—ha!” Going closer to it he noticed that some one had chipped off a little angle of the stone. “Now I would bet a hundred pounds that she did that,” he said. “And what the curious part of it is, it hasn’t been done a week. I wonder if she *did* do it! Well, we shall see. It is all in God’s hands now. Heaven help us fairly through it!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

LAURA soon wiped her tears. All the world was banded together against her, but not one of them should see that she had been crying. She had to make her face hard; she had to be cool and defiant towards the world in future. Maria Poyntz had done it, and she, who had six times her brains, could surely do it also!

Why, no—at least not without practice, for the tears which had been dried began to flow again. Lady Poyntz, with less heart and fewer brains, could manage the matter better than Laura. Powder as she would, her eyes were red at lunch; but she was singularly cool and self-possessed, though her mother and her grandmother nearly drove her out of her mind.

They were wonderfully high-bred women. *Tact* with them had become almost a science. They had no *written* rules of tact, but they had so many unwritten laws of that great science that it was almost reduced to exactitude. They, especially the elder, could pronounce in an instant whether a person had tact or had not; the consequence was that they had no tact at all. They had infinite *finesse* doubtless, all according to rule. It is humiliating enough to hear a costermonger telling his wife what he thinks of her in the vernacular, but it is still more humiliating to a quick-witted person to watch a woman, who has forgotten her art, trying her miserable little *ruses* upon him. Laura was such a quick-witted person, and saw in two minutes what these two good ladies

knew, and what they did not know. Her feelings towards them, as in some other cases, were—first curiosity, then contempt, and then indignation.

Their buoyant and pious gaiety in the first instance, though not overdone (they knew better than that), was perfectly obvious. There was no reason for this exhibition of Christian cheerfulness. Poor Harry Poyntz had died dreadfully the night before; and on any other similar occasion her grandmother would have kept her room except for meals, and would have improved the occasion as soon as her soup and glass of sherry had put life enough in her to talk. Therefore, why did she twitter like an old dicky-bird the moment Laura appeared? Moreover her mother, the inferior actor of the two, was arch. Now, if there was one thing Laura hated more than another, it was archness. She saw in the first three minutes that they knew all about Sir Robert Poyntz's intentions, and were, as far as that went, in her father's confidence.

That they knew nothing of the impending cloud of ruin hanging over their heads, she saw well enough also. "Poor father!" she thought, "he has behaved badly enough, but he *has* confided in me, and I will serve him. *They* would merely sell me to the highest bidder to-morrow." She saw, moreover, that they were both afraid of her, and she behaved, in manner only, with a cool recklessness which they must perfectly have understood.

One wonders if they had sense to see her own terror—a terror which grew on her as minutes went on: the terror of first seeing this *bête noire*—this detestable Sir Robert Poyntz, to whom she was sold like a sheep, to save her father from ruin. I doubt if they had; Laura's honest, cool recklessness puzzled them, I fancy. But the terror was there. At one time she hated him; at another time she made wild schemes of throwing herself on his generosity—appealing to his manhood to ——— she knew not what. She saw her own folly while she nursed the hope of its success. She was like a hare in a snare—deliverance would only come with death.

And this man was within three hundred yards of her. She had once coolly asked where her father was, and they had told her that he was over at the Castle with Sir Robert. Would her father bring him home to dinner? she asked herself. Of course he would; she would see her fate at seven o'clock.

The man had acted heroically in India. Yes; but there were heroes and heroes, as she knew well. One man, whose glorious deed of arms in the Crimea had sent her wild with enthusiasm, had been quartered at Plymouth. Her father had asked him over. She had

dressed herself with extra care to meet him, and had conned a pretty speech for him. She found her hero—a scowling, ill-tempered, vulgar fool, with no visible quality save ferocity.

So as the afternoon went on, and time got shorter, she found herself hating and dreading this man beyond conception. She discussed with herself whether she could best face it out by coming down to dinner first or last. Last she thought, on the whole; and so she let the second gong sound, and after five minutes' law came sailing resolutely into the room, "all eyes, mouth, and black velvet," as the Vicar—who was there—described her to his wife.

Sir Robert was not there. She chafed at this new prolongation of her misery, but she was calm, cool, and polite. There was another fifteen hours of anxiety before her. The Vicar, who knew everything, says that she behaved with the courage of a lion. Her father hardly spoke to her, and the weary evening wore through, the Vicar staying long and late, doing his duty like a man.

The next morning she knew her fate. She slept long and heavily, as the men who are to be hung at eight generally sleep—a forgetful, dreamless, Sancho-Panza sleep. At ten o'clock she was in the breakfast-room alone, trying to read "Adam Bede," when she heard the hall door opened, and the footsteps of two people crossing the flags straight towards the room where she sat.

The butler threw open the door and said, "Sir Robert Poyntz, Miss"—and then shut it again, which was the best thing he could do; and although he had been bribed for doing so very heavily, he did it well. She was alone in the room with him.

She ought to have risen to receive him, but the thing was sudden; and she felt faint and ill, as women do sometimes. She half turned her head towards him, bowed, and said, "My father is in the library."

"I did not come to see your father," he said; "I came to see you. I have bribed all your father's servants to watch you, that I might catch you alone; and I have succeeded."

It was partly the sound of the voice, and partly an indefinite feeling of anger, that made her rise and look at him. She saw before her the most magnificent man she had ever seen—a man of extraordinary beauty, with a high, square, resolute forehead—a man so young that the golden beard which was beginning to mantle his cheeks and his chin had no shadows in it as yet; you could still see beneath the golden haze that his beautiful mouth was parted in eagerness, curiosity, and admiration.

Why did she put her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight of him? Why did that quaint little sound—half-moan, half-cry—rise from her overloaded heart? And why did her lips begin

to murmur a prayer of thanksgiving? Questions easily answered. This detestable Sir Robert Poyntz—this inexorable creditor—the man who held them all in the hollow of his hand, and who stood before her in all the promise of a noble manhood—this man was the only man she had ever loved, and for whose love she had suffered so much. It was Hammersley himself, risen from the dead, with the wild lurid light of his Indian glory still blazing in his eyes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HE spoke first. "I have done as you bid me," he said; "and I have come back to ask you if I have done it amiss."

She had no answer ready. The poor girl was so utterly undone by her last day's misery, and so deeply happy and thankful at the discovery that the terrible Sir Robert was no worse a person than the one she loved best in the world, that she had no answer for him, and could make no fight. She was, or ought to have been, very angry; she had a hundred things to say to him. But she was taken by surprise—was like one awakening from a horrible dream, to find himself in the world once more, and she had nothing at all ready. She should have made her fight at once, no doubt, but for these reasons she could not. It simplified matters immensely.

It gave him hope. He saw that his wild dream was like to come true—nay, would certainly come true if he could only help speaking too fast (which he could not: a man just come out of such a wild, dark hurly-burly as the Indian Mutiny could not be expected to be so very cool). From the moment he saw her sit silent, after her recognition of him, he began to be certain of her. He knew she loved him once, but he did not know what had happened since. He would have been less eager—would have let matters take their course for a much longer time—if it had not been for Laura's emotion at seeing him again. That made him push on fiercely, and forgot all his worldly-wise resolutions. He saw that affairs was as he left them; but he was far too wise to claim any acknowledgment of love from her. He did not know all. He little thought for whom she was prepared, and for what she was prepared.

"I have come back again, Miss Seckerton, to know whether I have done enough to gain your respect." Some sudden impulse or instinct showed him that he must change his tone before her

tears were dried, and he knelt at her feet and said, "Laura! Laura! you loved me once; do you love me still?"

She found her voice: "Yes! yes! But why have you all used me so cruelly?"

* * * * *

When they had done being sentimental—which was very soon, seeing that a great deal of sentiment had been knocked out of both of them in a somewhat rough school—they returned to common-sense, of which both had a considerable stock. He began by asking her what she meant by her having been used cruelly.

"Never mind that now," she said. "Once and for all, tell me how all this has happened? You have surprised me into an admission by the suddenness of your appearance; it is only due to me to explain your incomprehensible conduct. Let what I have undergone through that conduct pass for a time; I only ask you to explain."

He did so, of course—partly in narrative, and partly by question and answer. I must be allowed to shape his story for him, only giving Laura's remarks when they are at all illustrative.

"You have heard of my father, and I wish to say little about him. He has, I fear, not left a good name in this part of the world."

"We need not begin so early," said Laura; "I have heard a great deal about your father."

"You must not believe all you have heard. He had very good qualities; I cannot bear to hear my father ill-spoken of. There were many worse men than my father. In time I will make you know my father as he really was; you have only heard the worst side of him yet. He was a very clever man, and very pious latterly. As for his riding—I think there would be only one opinion about that."

Laura loved him the better for his silly breakdown in trying to whitewash the memory of that most miserable old sinner his father, but she would not help him out. She had admitted more than she meant to already; she sat silent.

"But that is beside the mark, possibly," said Sir Robert. "Friends of the family, whose judgment I would be the last to impugn, but whose advice was certainly never asked, were of opinion that his establishment was not on the whole calculated to raise the moral tone of such an exceedingly ill-conditioned and turbulent boy as myself. Now I look on this as being an exceedingly fine point in my father's character; and I am sure you will agree with me about this. Although my father had never asked these people's advice,

yet he yielded to it. Their advice was forced on him in the most offensive way. Tom Squire (you know him) was in the room when it was forced on him, in the most eminently offensive way, by Sir Pickwick Downes and some one else—never mind who. They said, ‘You are a most disreputable and wicked old man; and you are lost to all sense of decency if you bring those boys here.’ That’s what they said to him; and see how nobly my father behaved. He took their advice, at least as far as concerned myself. He used to have poor Harry down, as you know yourself, having met him there.”

“Never mind your father,” she said.

“But I *do* mind my father. My father is an ill-understood man. What are the accusations against him? That he used to drink, and have in the servants to drink with him. And Harry, poor fellow, used to deny it in the strongest terms. No servant ever sat down before my father except old Tom Squire, whose mother was our nurse. Who is your Downes, that he is to dictate to a man in his own house?”

Laura didn’t know.

“He *had* Harry down. Who is your Downes, that he is to part a father from his eldest son? Me he never had down. One of the best points in my father’s character, one that showed his knowledge of human nature best, was that he couldn’t bear the sight of me.”

Laura burst out laughing, but she had to stop it again, lest she should get hysterical; recent events had been too much for her.

“I mean what I say,” continued he. “I was one of the most turbulent ill-conditioned young rascals that ever lived. The whole aim and object of my life, till six months ago, seems to me to have been quarrelling with my own brother. Laura, I never hated him; but his better, and higher and gentler nature irritated me.”

Laura gave a start. Had she given her heart to an absolute fool?

“I never saw this,” he continued, without having noticed her start, “until six months ago. I did something in India, no matter what; they have given me the Victoria Cross for it, so it counts for something; and that dear fellow who lies dead across the river wrote me the kindest and tenderest letter that ever one brother received from another—a letter written to me who had never done anything but vilify and backbite him!”

“About this letter?” said Laura. “Attend, please. Did he never vilify and backbite you?”

“Harry had an infirmity,” said Sir Robert. “From childhood Harry was very acute about money-matters, but I never held

Harry accountable. He had an infirmity—his brain softened, you know—he used to forget what he said last. It might happen to you or I to-morrow, you know.”

“About this letter once more,” said Laura; “did he say anything about me in it?”

“Not a word.”

“Did he ever mention me to you in any of his letters?”

“Never. I never had but one. He never said one word to me about you. Now I will go on with my story.

“My father, you must know, for some reason of his own—I *think* because he never liked me—left me entirely dependent on Harry, who I always thought liked me still less than my father did. Now, the most unfortunate thing was that Harry and I never got on together. My excuse for this is that Harry would be master, and I would never submit. I was sent to Eton to be out of his way, and kept from home. As we grew up we got on worse and worse, and at eighteen I found myself left in the world—free certainly, but entirely dependent on Harry.

“My father left me no guardians; I was entirely in Harry’s hands. And now I must allude to another infirmity of the poor fellow’s—I must, in justification: he had such a terrible tongue!”

“Ah! well I know it,” said Laura.

“He used to say such horrible things, and then laugh at them, that he drove you almost mad. I have heard him use his tongue so to that poor creature Wheaton—who, by-the-bye, must be provided for—that I wonder he never murdered him. He soon gave up this habit to me, at all events, as a general rule. But it would come back to him; he couldn’t help it. When we were boys I used to thrash him for it. But when we got too old for that, his fear of me left him, and he was pretty near as bad as ever. After our father’s death he told me, with a stinging insult, that he would allow me three hundred a year—that I might go anywhere, and do anything. I thought this a somewhat grand revenue, and went to London an independent gentleman.

“What did I do there? Why, I went there with three hundred a year, and spent nine hundred. How did I spend it? In muddle. You know how our family vacillated between extravagance and stinginess, often in the same individual. Well, I was in the economical mood when I went to London, and I apportioned out my income carefully—so much for my rooms and living, so much for my horse and groom, and so on; and I left a margin of £50 a year for contingencies. At the end of the year I was six hundred pounds in debt. I struggled and floundered on until I made it up to a clear thousand, and then I wrote and told my brother. He

was furious : he paid it, but stopped my allowance, formally renounced me, and left me to shift for myself with a hundred pounds.

“ I had been living a very pleasant life in London. Many of my Eton friends had not gone to the University—more than one of them was in the Guards. Their families received me very kindly—most of them from mere goodwill, but some because they foresaw what has actually happened—that Harry would die without a family, and that I should be rich. So, boy as I was, I was not merely had out for my dancing, which is admirable, but as a lad whom it was worth while to have one’s eye on. I have been very civilly bespoke, do you know, by very great people indeed—political people, I mean. Harry seemed to me always to be a *known man*, I cannot tell why or how ; it is a puzzle to me. Whether it was his tongue, which he could use in one case like a delicate poniard, and in another (when among his dependents and relatives) a brutal cudgel ; whether it was his credit as a pushing unscrupulous man, who must rise in spite of a reputation even then damaged ; or what it was, I cannot tell. There was something odd about Harry which made him a well-known man. I have, in the corners of drawing-rooms, and on staircases, among the men, heard him called every name under the sun. What puzzled me was that he should be so known, so talked about, and—what seemed to me stranger still—so feared.”

“ Did you never speak up for your brother ? ” asked Laura.

“ No ; it was impossible. Harry had earned his reputation, and he had it. I have not learned to lie yet.”

“ This fits well with your extravagant praise of him ten minutes ago. I thought that he was the saint then, and you the sinner.”

Sir Robert laughed aloud, and did not stop quickly ; and as poor Laura found that she could laugh now without crying, she joined in. They should not have laughed, you think, so soon after poor Sir Harry was dead. Well, they did : most of us have laughed between a death and a funeral.

Sir Robert went on : “ I never made him out a saint, save by contrasting him with my own wicked self.”

“ You are coming to your confessions, then. Pray, did you ever meet poor Harry in society ? ”

“ Never but once. I was only in society part of one season, and all that time he was getting the family affairs together. Near the end of my only season I was at a ball at Tulligoram House, and was attending to poor old Mrs. Smallwood. I had got her an ice, and was talking to her. The crowd was very close, and I noticed that she was back to back, at very close quarters, with Gordon

Dunbar, a six-foot guardsman. His back was towards hers, and he pushed her so close to me that she had to eat her ice under my nose ; for the Righter of all Wrongs and the Poet of the Domestic Affections were backing me up from the other side. All would have gone well had not the big guardsman who was backing up Mrs. Smallwood been introduced to some one. He made such a low bow, that he shot Mrs. Smallwood on to me head-foremost, and me on to the Righter of Wrongs, who, from his physical and moral elevation apologised. When I had finished blushing, and had got her right, I looked Gordon-Dunbar way again. It was my brother he had been introduced to ; and my brother was standing in the centre of a circle looking at Gordon Dunbar : perfectly dressed, perfectly at ease, looking at the guardsman, with an expression on his pale puffed face, and his shallow blue eyes, which said plainly, ‘ Now what is *your* métier ! How much are you worth ? ’ ”

“ Did they speak to him ? ”

“ Oh yes, they spoke to him ; but they seemed to look on him as some dreadful curiosity. Do you know, he did look very curious. His dress, to begin with : it was only black and white, of course. I can dress myself as well as any man alive ; but he could beat me. I dealt with the same tailor (who, by-the-bye, must be paid), but I never could *wear* my clothes as he did. You know the story about ‘ Good heavens, sir, walking trousers ! Why, you have been sitting down in them.’ It illustrates what I mean—Harry wore his clothes marvellously well. And add to this, he had a calm *look* with him, not a *stare*, which did wonders. When any one spoke he, by some twist in his neck, some turn in his eye, gave all present the idea that this fellow might be worth listening to or might not, and then, with a quiet but very slight turn-up of the chin, decided in the negative. I tell you, Laura, solemnly, that no angel in heaven has the temper which would have borne with him. The unutterable exasperation which he was capable of ——— ”

“ Hush ! hush ! ” said Laura, “ we must forget that. Did he speak this time you met him ? ”

“ Yes—to Gordon Dunbar, in his usual style. I never would have dared to say what he said : ‘ You have made a great mess of it in the Crimea. You have let the French beat us at all points. We seem to have as much pluck as they, but we want the brains—at least, I mean our army seems to want brains. Our system is wrong altogether. No man enters the Army, either as officer or private, who has the chance of a career elsewhere.’ ”

“ Did he dare say that ? ”

“He dare say anything.”

“Did Gordon Dunbar strike him down?”

“No; he is a gentleman. And he carried in his own person such a refutation of Harry’s nonsense, that every one laughed. Dunbar only bowed, and withdrew from the discussion.”

“Did poor Harry say anything to you?”

“To me? No. But he behaved so queerly. He looked me perfectly straight in the face, and then began talking to Mrs. Smallwood, with his face almost touching mine, *about me*. He gave her my character, speaking of me as ‘my brother here,’ but not addressing himself personally to me, or even after the first look glancing my way. He told her (this was to my face, mind!) that I was idle, extravagant, and, he feared, deceitful; but that I was generous and brave, and that (so he said—don’t laugh) my extraordinary personal beauty would make me friends everywhere, and that he hoped those friends would not find themselves deceived. And then he walked on.”

“Poor Harry was mad, you know,” said Laura. “No sane man ever acted or spoke like that.”

“Do you mean what he said about my personal appearance?”

“Yes.”

“Well, shall I go on with my story?”

“I think so. I want to hear, sir, what you did when you were left in London with your debts paid and one hundred pounds to spend.”

“I say, by-the-bye,” said Sir Robert, looking at his watch, “do you know, Laura, that I have been with you *tête-à-tête* an hour and a half? I must go to your father.”

“And leave the story of Cambuscan half untold: is this what you call an explanation of your extraordinary conduct?”

“No; you shall have it. You can surely trust me. But let me go to your father. Laura, you shall have every word; but there is a dark passage or two to come. Let there be no cloud over to-day’s sun.”

CHAPTER XLV.

THEY say that a large proportion (I am sure it is one-third, and think it is more) of all the folks who go mad, are driven so by long-continued anxiety about their pecuniary affairs. Whether Sir Charles Seckerton would ever have gone mad I cannot say:

we know that his relief had come, but he as little dreamt of it as he deserved it.

There seldom has lived a man with a sweeter disposition than had he. His careless, generous, *laissez-aller* temper had been one cause, though only one, of his ruin. But it was a very sweet temper. No one had ever seen the dark side of it but Laura; and she only once, for a minute, on the occasion when he proposed to her a marriage with Sir Robert Poyntz, and she resented it. Sir Charles' character among men was that of a perfectly determined person, thoroughly trustworthy, sensible, and decided—as well able to manage his own affairs as any man in the County. The truth never leaked out—circumstances saved that. Tell any man in that part of the County at this day, that Sir Charles had been recklessly extravagant, and had only saved his position in the world by a scandalous sale of his own daughter; and tell them, again, that the beautiful glorious Lady Poyntz was at one time hunted and driven into such a state of desperation as to acquiesce in the arrangement—tell them this, and they will laugh at you. But so it was.

Sir Charles' temper had lasted till this very day, and this very day it had given way. He had borne the misery and anxiety of debt, with a tolerably certain prospect of ruin, well enough. I have no doubt that he would have gone to Baden most decently, had it not been for that irrepressible Sir Harry Poyntz, who showed him how he could retrieve everything, or at least keep the whole thing in the family, by the marriage of Laura and Robert. His fate was in his daughter's hands. The first symptom of temper he had ever shown was when she rejected his hint about that matter with scorn. She had seemed to agree on that occasion, but had said not one word this last two days on the subject. He could not tell for certain what she would do; if she rejected him there was ruin; if she accepted him all would be well, in a sort of way; but he could not trust her. He had seen her obstinate as a child, and since; he had seen her show fight to more than one person: suppose she were to do so now? Ruin!

He had not recognised Sir Robert, to that young gentleman's vast amusement. He had "seen the likeness," but nothing more. Tom Squire, the huntsman, had come up to him this very morning, and Sir Charles had mentioned the likeness to him: adding, to poor old Tom's puzzlement, that poor Hammersley was the better-looking fellow of the two. Tom had been set on by Sir Robert, and told poor Sir Charles, with many exaggerations, the passages he had seen between Laura and Hammersley. Tom

couldn't make out, for the life of him, what Sir Charles knew and what he didn't. He played his part faithfully, and left him.

Sir Charles knew that Robert was coming this morning, and he was deeply anxious to know how Laura would receive him. He determined to make one more last appeal to her. He could not make up his mind what she meant to do. For two days she had kept silence, but she had worn a hunted desperate look, which gave him infinite disquiet in every way. He could see plainly that she had made some resolution, but what was it? Did she mean to acquiesce in the arrangement, or had she determined to lay the whole matter before Sir Robert Poyntz? I don't know what put that last idea into his head, but it was there, and would not go away. It got stronger as the two days went on—got so strong now that it seemed a certainty; and in going to seek for Laura, he felt that he was going to hear his doom from her lips.

“Where is Miss Seckerton?” he asked of a servant in the hall.

“In the breakfast-room, Sir Charles. Sir Robert Poyntz is with her.”

“How came he there? Who showed him in?”

“Parker (the butler) showed him in, a quarter of an hour ago,” said the guilty-looking man, turning scarlet.

“Who opened the door to him?”

“I did, Sir Charles.”

“You and Parker pack out of this house in an hour! How much did Sir Robert give you, you rascal?”

“Only two sovereigns, sir; upon my soul, only two sovereigns!”

“Go and tell Parker to be out of the house in an hour—never to set face on me again; I shall do him a mischief if he does.”

And so he was too late! And Laura was alone with the man—at this moment, in her desperation, betraying her father's cause to Sir Robert. What was actually passing in that room we have seen already. Meanwhile Sir Charles' temper and judgment had both given way, under the long-continued strain of anxiety; and he strode towards the drawing-room, believing himself ruined, to announce his ruin to his wife and her mother.

They were sitting in their usual places—Lady Emily writing letters, and Lady Southmolton, having just finished her devotional reading for the morning, knitting. The dear old lady had three times the quickness of wit of her daughter. She no sooner set eyes on her son-in-law's face than she rolled up her knitting, stuck the pins in it, put it aside on the Bible, and folding her hands, said, “My poor Charles—my poor dear Charles! Come, tell us all about it quietly; what is it?”

At these words Lady Emily looked up, and when she saw her husband's ghastly terrible face, she began to cry. All the training in the world would never make that fat silly body into a heroine, like her mother. She was almost entirely in a state of useless collapse in the conversation which followed.

"I want to ask you two some questions, and to tell you some news. First, I want to ask you this: Had either of you any idea that Laura became attached to that unfortunate young gentleman Poyntz-Hammersley, whom I, like a ruined old lunatic as I am, admitted into familiarity?"

The old lady did not answer Sir Charles at once. She addressed herself to her daughter, who, as her experienced eye showed her, was making every possible preparation for making a fool of herself, and was very nearly ready to begin the performance. She said: "Emily, my love, there is nothing like the most perfect calmness in family affairs of this kind. If you do not find yourself equal to being calm, I shall use such influence as I possess as a mother to persuade you to leave the room."

Lady Emily went no further with her preparations. She merely, forgetting that weight had come with years, cast herself into an easy-chair, which creaked, but bore up nobly, and bided her time. A little bird tells me that at this time, feeling safe under the guidance of that noble old generalissimo her mother, her face assumed an expression of the most intense curiosity; but this is merely hear say tittle-tattle.

The old lady turned then to her son-in-law, and said: "My dearest Charles, you take us utterly by surprise. That sort of thing has happened, I know, and will probably happen again; but with regard to our Laura, I won't believe a word of it."

"Why was the match broken off between Laura and Hatterleigh? Had this anything to do with it?"

"*Laura* broke off the match. Neither of them have ever deigned any explanations; but this had nothing to do with it. It is utterly untrue from beginning to end. May I ask what grounds you have for such a monstrous question?"

"You are very good to me. Why don't you upbraid me with my insensate folly for allowing them to ride about together? It is all too true!"

"Charles, come here and kiss me." (He did so.) "My poor dear boy, who has been putting this nonsense into your head? Come, tell me."

"Squire."

"A tipsy old goose! Let us dismiss the subject; it is so utterly below our contempt. What on earth has made you bring up such

a subject, at the very time when we are all so anxious that matters should go well with our gallant young friend over the water ? ”

“ I fear it is terribly true. Now let me ask you, what sort of mood is Laura in this morning ? ”

“ Now we are coming to common-sense,” said the kind old lady. “ Why, I am sorry to say our Laura is not in one of her best moods—a trifle rebellious against our designs for her happiness. I don’t suppose for an instant that *you* have let those little designs of ours reach her ; but they *have* reached her, and she is in a mood. She must not meet that man at present. You must take us to London, and all will go well. Time ! time ! ”

Sir Charles leant his back against the chimney-piece. “ I have told her,” he said quietly, “ with my own fool’s lips, all those little designs for her happiness ; and he has bribed my servants, and at this present moment is closeted with her in the breakfast-room.”

Lady Southmolton lost her self-possession, for the first and only time in that part of her history which we have to relate. She unfolded her two white hands, and spread them abroad before her. “ Then I can only say,” she said, in a tone which was almost shrill, “ that the whole thing is off, and that we may give it up utterly and for ever ! Laura is in a mood this morning which I decline to describe. She has turned on her mother and on me, and has denounced us for selling her to the highest bidder ; has told us to our faces that if there were such a thing as an Anglican convent, she would enter it to-morrow. She said that all which prevented her entering a Papist one was, first that she loathed Popery, and secondly that there was some other reason—in short, got incoherent in her anger. My sweet Charles, it was a good scheme enough ; but since that foolish young man has chosen to treat her as he would have treated a girl sent out to India to marry the first man she could catch, the whole thing is over. It was a pretty scheme, but it is a scheme of the past. Think no more about it. We shall do well enough with her yet.”

“ Have you any idea what Laura’s second reason for not entering a convent was ? ” asked Sir Charles.

“ Not the slightest.”

“ I can tell you. Robert Poyntz is my creditor for eighty thousand pounds. He can ‘ annex ’ this estate whenever he chooses. Our only chance of pulling through was his marriage with Laura.”

At this point Lady Emily did make a fool of herself. I don’t think that anything would be gained by describing a silly woman in hysterics. It was her first trial, and she broke down under it.

I only wish the reader to understand that she did it thoroughly, and took her time about it.

But she was quiet enough at last to let the conversation proceed. Lady Southmolton—who had risen from her chair, and had helped Sir Charles to pacify her—was the first to resume the conversation. She took her old attitude and said, with her kind old smile—

“ Well, my dearest Charles, my dear friend and son for so many years, and so you are ruined ? ”

“ Utterly ! ”

“ Well, son, we shall have to go to Germany, and live on my money. The principal thing we have to think of is where. I should like Brunswick ; but the Duke is not married, and he is horribly rich ; and it is *not* cheap, whatever they may say. Dresden, dear, is very pleasant and gay, but it is horribly cold in winter ; and I am a fanciful old woman, and object to the statues of August der Stark—they are an outrage to public morality ! Hesse is dull, Ems and Wiesbaden dissipated.”

“ But is there no hope from Laura ? ” asked Sir Charles.

“ Not the least,” she answered. “ She is in one of her obstinate moods. I don’t blame your family. The Seckerton blood, my dear Charles, never shows any obstinacy. This is the Sans-merci blood, which I have unfortunately transmitted to your family, and for which I owe you all apologies. She is behaving to-day so exactly like Southmolton’s father, that I am ashamed to look you in the face. She has not certainly put the red-hot poker in the coal-scuttle, as Lord Southmolton did to annoy me, the first time we went and stayed with him ; but she shows the blood. It is all my fault, Charles. Come, can’t I make you laugh—— ? Well, then, listen to an old woman, and let us return to the subject in hand. My dearest boy—Brussels——”

The dear old lady’s quaint consolations came to an end here, and were never resumed again. The butler—the proscribed and banished Parker—threw open the room-door, and announced

“ Sir Robert Poyntz ! ”

CHAPTER XLVI.

SIR CHARLES was still standing with his back against the chimney-piece : Lady Emily had sunk back in a chair, and the old lady was as she always was. Sir Charles advanced with *empressement* :

Lady Emily rose and bowed, but was in terror of her red eyes. The only one of the three who kept their presence of mind was the old lady. She resumed her knitting very carefully, and said : " Now, here is Sir Robert Poyntz, for instance. If he has his family's manners, he will back an old woman up against both of you. Don't you think Brussels the most charming place on the Continent, sir? You have never been there—well, you may admire it for all that. I have never been to the Mauritius; but I admire ' Paul and Virginia. ' "

" What do you want me to say, Lady Southmolton? " said Sir Robert, laughing; " I will say anything you wish. "

" You are very *maladroit*, young gentleman. India is a good school of arms; don't force me to say that it is a bad school of manners. You should have *known* what I wanted you to say; or, failing that, should never have committed such a *gaucherie* as to ask me. "

" I am very sorry, " said the young fellow, laughing; " but something has happened this morning which has made me forget the few manners I ever had. "

" We can see that, sir, " said Lady Southmolton. " None of your Indian manners here, sir! Do you know, sir, that I am one of the most terrible old women in England; and that if you forfeit my good word, society is closed to you, sir? You are behaving with the most unbecoming levity in my most awful presence, sir; what do you mean by it? "

" I am not a bit afraid of you, Lady Southmolton, " said Sir Robert; " I am afraid of no one this morning. "

The kind old lady looked round to see if any more of what some folks call " chaff " was necessary. No; the brave old lady had held the field long enough. Sir Charles and Lady Emily were both perfectly calm; but as she looked round, her eye lighted on the face of Sir Robert Poyntz. She said at once, " Come here to me, immediately; I want to look at your face. "

He came, and knelt before her. She looked into his face three or four times, but she was baffled. She recognised his wondrous personal beauty in a moment; and she saw something else at once which puzzled her extremely—it was the look of his eyes. *She* knew well enough what was the cause of that tender brilliance in those eyes. The man was a successful lover—she could see that fast enough. And the man had just been closeted with her own Laura, with a previously-declared intention of making love to that imperially obstinate young lady; he had come from that audience-chamber with that flash in his eyes, instead of looking like a whipped hound. Had Laura been false to all her teaching?

Had she allowed this man to be successful with her after his declared intention, on the very first interview, instead of decently fencing him off for weeks, for months, to save appearances? Her own Laura could never have done that—it was a monstrous impossibility! Yet there was that light in the man's eyes, which she could not mistake; and then came, sudden and swift, the thought, "What if Laura *had* acted up to my teaching—what else could she have done?" If she had ruined all her future prospects of happiness by allowing herself to be won too easily by this man, whom had she, poor Laura, to thank for giving herself to this enraptured fool, Sir Robert Poyntz? No one but Lady Southmolton herself. She was puzzled and frightened. She said, "Get up, sir, and tell your story—you puzzle me. I am an old woman. Get up, and explain that light in your eyes."

He rose up, and turned to Sir Charles Seckerton. "My dear Sir Charles," he said, "I am your debtor for five hundred pounds."

"It pleases you to say so."

"I owe you five hundred pounds for a horse of yours, which I borrowed, and which was drowned. I mean 'The Elk.' Do you really mean to say that you have not recognised me yet, and I laughing in your face all yesterday?"

"Are you Hammersley?"

"Of course I am. Has my beard altered me so much then?"

Lady Southmolton cared to hear no more. She went on with her work. The story had lost its interest for her, for she had read the *dénouement* in Sir Robert's eyes. Her only thought was, "Can I get these three to hold their tongues? Everything has gone well, and will go well, if they will only talk about the weather and the crops, and let the Laura business stand over for a month. This man must have made it safe with her, when he was down here masquerading. What did Lady Herage mean by deceiving us so shamefully? And to think of the madness of Charles! He must—unless he is blind, unless he had got utterly idiotic over his pecuniary affairs—have seen the whole of this going on under his own nose, at the very time that he believed this young gentleman to be penniless and illegitimate. And Laura! This accounts for much, however. One never knows these girls. I would have gone bail for her discretion—in fact, I did so not ten minutes ago. I hope to goodness there will be no declaration for a month: we can defy the world then! I wonder how far she went with him? And the man was drowned, and buried—at least had a stone put up to him, which is the same thing. I am not in the habit of being utterly puzzled: but I am

now. I wonder if the four have brains enough among them to avoid any sentimentalism for a month?"

They had. Sir Charles had shown his wish to have no further explanations at present, by testifying the most elaborate commonplace surprise and pleasure in a humorous manner. Lady Emily, after having done the same thing in a less degree, left the room and returned with Laura, who was formally introduced to the man who had kissed her a quarter of an hour before, as an utter stranger. Laura! Laura! you artful young lady, you carried the farce too far, when you looked at him with languid curiosity. You overdid your part, my Lady Poyntz; and very nearly caused your outraged grandmother to forget her manners for the first time in her life, and burst out laughing.

"Will you walk, my dear Sir Robert?" asked Sir Charles; and it appeared that he would. They went out on to the terrace together, and then Sir Charles said, turning suddenly on him—

"I must have explanations, Robert, on all except one point. That I can't allow to be touched. I—I can't explain. Now I have *you* to deal with—Hammersley to deal with. I—I *won't* explain. I am not afraid of you. I am Sir Charles Seckerton of Leighton Court once more, and you are little Bob Poyntz, the ill-tempered boy. I won't explain what point I refer to. I have been looking at your face, and I am puzzled. I know how you bribed my servants, and where you have been: on that point I will not have one word of explanation."

"Not for worlds!" said Sir Robert. "You must be very angry with me. I have served you very badly. We must leave that point quite alone at present; then we can defy the world! *Are* you very angry with me, sir? Can you ever forgive me?"

"One will try to forgive a man to whom one owes as much as eighty thousand pounds."

"So much as that! Then I must take the hounds from you as soon as—— What am I talking about? I was trespassing on forbidden ground. Dear Sir Charles, what explanations do you want?"

Sir Charles wanted to know his history, and how he had come here.

Poyntz told him the same story he had told Laura, up to the point where he was left nearly penniless in London.

"And what did you do then, sir?" said Sir Charles, severely. "I must have everything explained; my position demands it."

Poyntz looked once at the old man, and did not know whether to be pained or pleased. He knew the awful strait that Sir Charles was in; and he did not know whether to be pained or

pleased at this fresh self-assertion on the part of the poor old gentleman, the very first moment he felt himself safe. Knowing everything, he was a little pained on the whole. Knowing everything, he could not help wishing that this extravagant and somewhat selfish old gentleman had tried, after the terrible lesson he had had, to develop himself into something better and newer, instead of trying to reassert himself back into his old position. As the day went on, Sir Robert Poyntz wished this more and more, as Sir Charles grew more and more stilted and pompous; but, shrewd as he was, he did not know everything. Sir Charles' self-assertion for the next week was only what vulgar people call "company manners." It was the height of discretion. Things had to be hushed up, and among them all they hushed up the matter most perfectly—the proof of which is that no one but you and I know the real truth of *it*. The Downes faction don't know the truth yet. "He vowed he would win her. He came down disguised, disclosed himself to her father and mother, and won her affections. He fled to India to avoid his creditors." That is Constance Duchess of Pozzi d'Oro's story to this day.

Poyntz said, while walking on the terrace, "You ask me for explanations about my life after I was left destitute? You have no right to do so *now*. Do you understand that?"

"Most perfectly, Robert—most perfectly."

"But in a week or so you *will* have the right. Do you understand that also?"

"No," said Sir Charles. "Don't you see, my dear boy, that, under present circumstances, I musn't understand that? Your good sense will show you that I am Sir Charles Seckerton and you are Sir Robert Poyntz for the next three weeks, or, if the women don't object, say a fortnight. Before a fortnight has passed I couldn't outrage the County by understanding anything of the kind."

"Well, then," said Sir Robert, with a laugh in his eyes, which would have been visible in his mouth also had it not been clouded with his golden beard, "will you receive my explanation as a dear old friend of our family?"

"No, Robert. I demanded them as my right in my position as chief man of this part of the County. Consider me as dead, and that you are making them to Downes, who will succeed me. But go on."

"Do you remember me as a boy?" he asked.

"I can remember you."

"Was I not a fearful young ruffian?"

"You and your brother used to quarrel and fight a great deal."

“I was a fearful young ruffian. Perhaps it is complaisance, perhaps it is want of recollection, which makes you shake your head, but it is true. Shall I prove it to you? When I had been about two months at Eton, the master of my house and Hawtrey were talking about me. My master said, ‘That boy is more like a devil than a human being; I cannot think what to do with him.’ ‘Shall I expel him?’ said the Doctor. ‘No,’ said the other, ‘for he is not vicious, and would burn his right hand off sooner than lie; but he’s so fiendishly fierce and wild.’ ‘Won’t the others lick him into shape?’ said the Doctor. ‘No,’ said the other; ‘there is no one in the house dare face him; he is the most fearful irreclaimable little savage I ever saw.’ So they spoke of me that day. That night was probably the most eventful of my whole life.

“The last thing I did before I went to bed was to have a perfectly causeless fight with a boy a stone heavier than myself, about a matter provoked entirely by my own evil temper. He thrashed me at last, and I went to bed swearing, and when I was alone sobbed myself to sleep with impotent rage. I had slept but very little time when I was awoke by a light in my eyes; and I started wildly up, with clenched fists, thinking they were come to bully me.

“There was a touch, sir, on my clenched hand which made me open it. Ah, sir, I can feel it now—the touch of five long delicate bony fingers, very warm and dry, but very gentle. I sat up in bed, and looked into the face of the owner of those fingers, and grew still, and stayed the curse which was on my lips. I never uttered that curse, sir, and (I speak no romance) I never spoke to that person before then or since.

“It was Lorimer, one of the biggest boys in the school: a tall, gaunt, weak boy, who could never play, but who must have played at some time or another, for he was appealed and referred to in almost everything by the others. I had noticed him about often. I had seen him gently making the peace between little boys, and preventing their fighting. I had seen him walking with masters. He had been ill once, and I had heard all the boys asking one another how the ‘Colonel’ was that morning; whereas other boys had died, and there had been no great talk about it. I was so utterly unpopular that I had no confidant to ask about him; yet I had got up a sort of languid interest in him. He was not in my house, and yet here he was, sitting on my bed, holding the candle to my face, and stroking my hair.

“I spoke not one word—he began. He told me, word for word, the conversation he had overheard about me, between the

Doctor and the Master, but I remained perfectly dumb ; then he said—

‘ My poor fellow, try to do better. I know you can if you choose. Such a one as you were never made for destruction. Has no one ever told you of the Christ who died for you ? ’

“ Before heaven, Sir Charles Seckerton, nobody ever had, save one—old Mrs. Squire, my nurse, the woman at whose deathbed I first met Laura ! With the exception of her quaint Calvinistic teaching, I was as utterly neglected, as regards religious thought, as any wretched boy who sweeps the streets. I knew my Catechism, Old Testament chronology, and so forth, just as I knew my Ovid ; but with regard to my religious teaching, hers was all I had ever had, for my tutors had given me none whatever. What wonder that I shook my head at him ? ”

‘ Will you come to me, my boy, and let me talk to you ? ’

“ I remained silent as Memnon at midnight. He little dreamed how soon the sun would rise on me, and raise harmonies from my dead granite. He gave me one more melancholy look from his large brown sunken eyes—I shall never forget those eyes any more, Sir Charles——”

A long silence. Two turns up and down the terrace, without a word spoken on either side.

“ His footfall had scarcely died away upon the stairs when I arose. I was at that time, poor little wretch of thirteen as I was, in a general rebellion against the world. I think that my idea was, that anything in the shape of constituted authority was a thing to be opposed, kicked, bitten, and generally defied by every person of the least spirit. I don’t know why I took that resolution into my head, but I know that I held to it with the most astounding resolution—with as great resolution as I did to the new line of conduct on which I had determined when I got out of bed, lit a candle, and picked up my Riddle and Arnold and my Livy out of the corner where I had hurled them in a paroxysm of rage, before I put out the light. Part of my plan had been to refuse learning anything, to make myself celebrated as the very worst boy in the school, and revenge myself on the world by getting expelled. I never slept that night till my work was finished.

“ I rose in the morning a perfectly different person. I rose in my class. I was very gentle and civil to every one ; I gave way in every direction. I made no concealment, nor any assertion of the change in me ; and before a fortnight was gone, I began to be recognised as a good fellow. The bitterest thing of all was that they said, in my hearing, that it was the thrashing Yelverton

had given me before I went to bed that had changed me so. Could you have stood that and made no sign?"

"No! I couldn't have stood that."

"I did; and won popularity in spite of it. You wonder at this sudden change—indeed, I do myself. You say 'he was more like a fiend than a boy, by all accounts; and yet, because another boy sat on his bed for ten minutes, he turned out one of the best-remembered fellows at Eton.' You *know* I was popular."

"Indeed, George Downes represented you as being most popular."

"I don't know that one ought to wonder. I am very resolute—I was very resolute to prove myself a *mauvais sujet*, and was equally so to make myself the most popular fellow in Eton—equally so after somebody said something which sent me to India. I wish some one would guide my resolutions—I will be answerable for carrying them out. Besides, poor Lorimer's visit had a sentimental effect on me. Do you know that I am a bit of a poet, and have written verses?"

Sir Charles, not seeing what else to say, said that many other perfectly respectable people had done the same thing.

"I know," said Sir Robert. "But I want to tell you about Lorimer again. I never spoke to that fellow, and never would speak to him. Not one living soul in the world, except you and I, knows that he came to my bedside that night. I made one of my mulelike resolutions; and I said, 'He shall see the fruits first, and then we shall talk more as equals.' The last time I saw him was nearly the end of the half-year. I had been doing what I had often done lately—making peace between two boys, one of whom had called the other a liar. I did not succeed, because one must fight over that, you know; but I was trying to get a retraction, and I said, 'What is the good of giving the lie?—He believed what he said—Do be reasonable, old fellow,' and all that sort of thing; when I turned round and saw Lorimer. *He* stopped the fight, and then he turned smiling to shake hands with me. But the half-year was not over, and I was perfectly resolute in my muleishness; I turned away. I never saw him again."

"Left, I suppose?" said Sir Charles, who was thinking of a good many things.

"I went away for the holidays to our cousins, the Dorsetshire Poyntzes (where I always went for vacations), who were exceedingly sorry to have such a young ruffian foisted upon them. But I won the battle there, sir. The girls cried when I came away. I was resolute that they should love me, and I made them.

Then my half-year's silence with Lorimer was finished ; and I girded up my loins, and ran from Slough, in nine minutes forty seconds, to meet him, leaving my things to come on in a fly."

"And I guess that he had left?"

"Dead, sir—dead of consumption! When it was announced in school they wondered why I burst in such a tempest of tears. Others cried too, a few of them, but none like me. And that interview betwixt him and me is known only to you and I—to God and himself. The fellows of my time, at Eton, believe to this day it was the thrashing I got from poor dear Yelverton the night before."

Several turns were taken up and down the terrace before either spoke. Sir Charles had by this time found out that things were going well with him. He was the first to speak—

"Now, I am going to have no more sentimentality. I have adjured you, on your allegiance to the County, to tell me, the head of that County, what you did with yourself that year in which you were missing. You have practically refused, and put me off with romantic stories which have made me cry, whereas I want to laugh. Come Bob, old boy, tell me all about it. I used to tip you; let me have my fun for my money. What did you do?"

"I had rather not say; I am ashamed of myself. But what *could* I do?"

"Out with it."

"Well, I rode steeplechases. Let's have no more of this."

"I suppose I mustn't ask your imperial highness how it was you favoured *me* with a visit; and what the deuce Sir George Herage meant by sending you here under false colours?"

"I hardly know what you mean. The facts are these. I was riding a horse for sale there, and Sir George Herage recognised me, and I rode some horses for him; and he promised to hold his tongue about me, and who I was; and then there was a confounded row about one of the girls—I never said six words to the girl; and then Harry came to stay there, and there was a general row. Harry denounced me in the stableyard; and then Sir George told me privately that you wanted a fellow, and I thought I would come and see the old place, for I was hunted to death; and I came, and no one knew me but Tom Squire and his mother. I was very happy here. I got very fond of you. I bullied you royally, though, didn't I?"

"You did indeed. But they said you had hunted at Pau?"

"That will pass for truth; I was there six weeks."

"Steeplechasing?"

“ Oh, hang the steeplechasing ! Don't bring *that* up again.”

“ But we were always hearing from your brother that you were in India ? ”

“ A pure fiction of Harry's, which he put about when I disappeared from society. It was convenient enough for me. I never contradicted it. I never went to India, as you will hear, until a year ago.”

“ There is one other thing I must ask you. Lady Herage sent us word that you were the illegitimate brother (don't laugh) of yourself and Harry ; that is why I received you as I did ? ”

“ That must be poor Harry's doing ; that bears his mark altogether.”

“ Is there such a person ? ”

“ There is. Harry wrote to me about him the other day, asking me to take care of him ; but I have never seen him in my life. Now, I want to ask you one thing. When you take into consideration how utterly lonely and neglected I have been all my life, do you pronounce that I have done well or ill ? ”

“ I think you have done wonderfully well ! ”

CHAPTER XLVII.

“ In time,” said Sir Charles, “ we shall find out how you came to be drowned. How pleasant and old-timelike your voice sounds to me, Robert ! I was very fond of you.”

Sir Robert laid his hand on the old gentleman's shoulder and went on—

“ I was very happy here. I could not have stayed after Harry came, of course, but my visit was cut short accidentally.”

“ Indeed ! ”

“ Yes. It happened all in one minute, that an irrepressible sense of my degradation and uselessness came over me—was forced on me. I took one of my sudden resolutions, and in ten minutes was turning old Squire out of bed to put it in force.”

Sir Charles asked no questions about the cause of this singular resolution, but thought the more.

“ I wanted him to get me ‘ The Elk ; ’ I ordered him to do so. I need not tell you he would sooner obey a Poyntz than a Seekerton. In ten minutes more I was in the saddle, ready for

a wild ride of five miles across the sands to Berry Head, before the flowing tide."

"In the name of heaven what made you so mad?"

"I partly wanted to fly from the place, and partly I wanted, with my usual impetuosity, to get into action at once; and the doing something desperate and wild suited my humour too. Tom Squire did not know where I was going until he saw me turn for the sands; and then he startled the night with a cry which I should have thought would have reached you, and ran after me. When I was a few hundred yards out on the sands, I turned. The Point was black behind me, and nothing was distinguishable under the dark hanging woods; but there came a wild shout of despair from them, which was repeated twice and died off into a wild wail; and I was alone far out on the sands, with the crawling sea on my right. I steered by the light on Brinkley Cleave. When I looked back I could see only one light—that from a window in your house. It was the only light for very far, and I waved my hand in farewell to it."

"It was the light in my daughter's room; we calculated on the circumstance at the time."

"When I was, as I guessed, about halfway across, I began to see the utter folly of which I had been guilty: before I guessed that the water was less than two hundred yards off, it suddenly slid past the horse's feet; and though I managed to splash out of it again, it was only for a moment, for it was all round. My pace became a walk, and I was, I guess, two miles from shore. I had a presentiment, which almost amounted to a certainty, that I should come to no harm; but things began to look very awkward indeed, and I began to shout. The water was above the horse's girths before a boat was near enough to answer me. I got on board. The poor horse neighed to me, as though to ask me by what means we had come into this strange position, but contentedly followed the boat out into water deep enough for him to swim. I held his bridle, and encouraged him with my voice; but the swell was a little too heavy, and before we were halfway to the shore his head went down; and I, finding that I was only dragging a deadweight, let go of the bridle, and that was the last of 'The Elk.'

"Now a new idea seized me, which was in many ways pleasing to me. I determined to disappear, leaving no traces of myself. By giving the men—who were Teignmouth men, not likely to land here—a couple of pounds, and pretending that I should get into trouble about the horse, I persuaded them to say nothing about it. They, after a night's fishing, landed me at Teignmouth. I

immediately went off to London, to Harry. I threw myself upon his generosity, and asked him to get me a commission in a regiment going to India. The negotiation would have gone right from the first, if I had not somewhat foolishly threatened, in case of his refusal, to disgrace the family by enlisting in a dragoon regiment. To my dismay he jumped at the idea, and was very much taken with it indeed. He said it was a capital way to make an ass of myself without any expense, and strongly urged me to do so. He saw he was teasing me, and went on; but my imperturbable patience was too much for him, and he yielded. I think you know everything now."

"Are you going to stay in the Army?" asked Sir Charles, in an offhand manner, as if it was no concern of his.

"That is exactly as Laura chooses," said the heedless Robert.

"I beg your pardon," said Sir Charles, quickly.

"I was saying," answered Robert, reddening, "that is just exactly as Lawrence chooses—Sir John Lawrence, you know. He has been kind to me, and I shall be entirely guided by him in this matter."

Sir Charles said "Yes, I understand;" and the next time that Robert made a joke he laughed at it very loud and long, to make up for his self-denial on this occasion.

"There remains but little more to tell. Another chapter, and our tale is finished.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A YEAR OR more passed by, and the Great Indian Mutiny had burnt itself into darkness and silence. It was all over, except telling the tale of the dead. Still, in London and elsewhere, after each mail houses would be seen with the shutters up for a week; and bevies of girls, who but a week ago were dancing in their finest clothes, would begin to creep out at dusk in deepest mourning, and say, to those who knew them well enough to speak to them in their grief, "that mamma was not so wild to-night, but oh, that it was so very very dreadful——!"

In these times—the times when the excitement had died out, and the dull grief was making itself felt, and we were beginning to count the cost—it so happened that Lord Hatterleigh was spending the last few days of his honeymoon at Dover.

He had married a lady who was pleased to call herself Scotch,

for what reason I am unable to explain. Her father, the Marquis of Ericht, had certainly large possessions in Scotland ; but if he claimed to be of any particular race, it should have been to be Scandinavian-French. However, he chose to call himself Scotch, to wear a kilt, and to have that other barbarous English invention, the bagpipes, to play to him at meals. His daughter also was a perfect devotee on the matter of Scotch nationality, and it was no one's business but their own ; and therefore we will yield so far, under protest, as to say that Lord Hatterleigh had married a Scotch lady—and an excellent good business he had made of it.

With her we have nothing to do. She was a lady at all points, and we can or need say no more. With regard to him we may say a few words :—

He had grown into a big and somewhat handsome man ; now that he had let his long black beard grow, he would pass muster anywhere—nay, do more than pass muster. His broad shoulders were still so loosely hung, that one could not help wishing that some drill-sergeant had taken him in hand, and forced him to hold his really fine head higher. There was only one symptom of his old muffishness left about him. He had clung to that old valetudinarian self-considering creed, which he had got, after all, from his mother, as long as he could ; but he had been driven from point to point of it—first by Laura Seckerton (now Lady Poyntz), and secondly by Lady Jane Portobello, his present bride—until he had hardly any of it left. The old creed was very dear to him, but he had been laughed out of it. He made a stand at a certain point : he took to wearing spectacles. That there was nothing the matter with his eyesight he had to confess to Bradbury, at whose shop he bought his spectacles. And so Bradbury gave him a pair with flat glass lenses. These spectacles were only the last appeal for extra-consideration by a man who had been taught by his mother to appeal to the pity of society, and who was growing out of that humbug rapidly. What need to say more of Lord Hatterleigh ? Some say they know him, and that he is showing an honesty and, what is more, a power which is making itself felt. You could count on your fingers the men who are able, so well as he, to remember old inconsistencies, and to hang them up to ridicule.

It so happened that Lord Hatterleigh and his wife were walking on the pier at Dover, up-and-down, taking their airing in the full blast of a south-easterly wind, when they noticed a movement among the sailors on the quay, and at the same time saw that a large ship was coming into the harbour. He asked the reason of the harbourmaster, who was known to him.

“It is the *Supply*, my lord, with invalided troops from India. We sent a boat out to her, and the officer commanding the soldiers has persuaded the captain to put in here. He prefers taking his men on by rail to Chatham, to forcing the ship round to Chatham by sea. There are many dead, and many dying.”

“My love,” said Lord Hatterleigh to his bride, “we had better go home to lunch.”

“George,” she said, “I must see these men land. I don’t want to go back to lunch; I must see this.”

“It will not be at all a fit sight for you,” said Lord Hatterleigh. “Your mother would be furious if she heard of it.”

“But we needn’t tell her,” said Lady Hatterleigh.

“But my mother would never forgive me,” said Lord Hatterleigh.

“Then tell her to mind her own business. Do let me stay, George!”

After this appeal there was no more to be said, and there never is. When will women gain the secret of power?

The ship was alongside the pier by this time, and the London, Chatham, and Dover Company had a special train ready for them; and the victims of the war began to creep ashore—some nearly well, but looking like old men; some maimed, walking on crutches; some beyond everything, carried with hanging limbs in the arms of the sailors. But there was one among them on whom every one looked with greater interest than the others, and that was the officer in command of this regiment of ghosts, himself the most ghostly object there.

He was a very tall and handsome man, in full uniform, covered with Crimean and the older Indian decorations. One armless sleeve was looped up over his breast; but it was not that which drew all eyes to him, for there was plenty like him in that respect—it was his face. There were pale faces there, but none so deadly white as his; and there were sad faces too, but none so sad and worn as his. Lady Hatterleigh called her husband’s attention to him, saying—

“If I look at that man much longer I shall begin to cry.”

Lord Hatterleigh turned and looked the way she indicated, and as he did so exclaimed—

“Bless me, how dreadful! It is Hilton; and his arm gone.”

His good-natured soul overflowed at the sight of his old acquaintance in such a plight; and he made towards Hilton, and took his solitary hand in both of his. A very faint smile came over Hilton’s face when he recognised Lord Hatterleigh behind his beard and spectacles, but it died away again.

“Come, you can laugh still, you see; was it my spectacles you were laughing at, or my beard? I won't ask how you are, for you are very ill indeed, and must be taken care of. You must come to Grimwood instantly, and my wife shall nurse you. I am married now, you know. Hilton! Hilton! what have you been doing with yourself? You have been at death's door. You must come home with us to Grimwood directly, and be nursed. The women will all be fighting who is to attend on you. The Duchess of Pozzo d'Oro is at Hoxworthy with her father; you remember Constance Downes? And again,” he continued, taking off his spectacles, and fixing an honest manly eye on General Hilton's, “there is Lady Poyntz; she would form one of the Nightingale sisterhood, my dear fellow. How you and Laura used to squabble and fight, to be sure! She is down there also——”

“Lady Poyntz!” said Hilton, clutching his arm; “is she *there?*”

“Not the dowager, you know; not Maria Huxtable—Laura Seckerton, I mean. She pitched me overboard, you know, and married Sir Robert Poyntz, who had been down there before, masquerading, as a foxhunter from Leicestershire, and got drowned, and buried, and sundry. Not that Miss Seckerton did not behave nobly, sir—but that is not to the purpose. You must come to Grimwood and all the old set will vie with one another in taking care of their dear old Bayard.”

General Hilton did not speak for nearly a minute; and then he said, very low, but without a quaver in his voice—

“How monstrous kind you are, Hatterleigh! If I ever had been upset in a sentimental way, I should be so now. I am not at all sure that I could have answered you a moment sooner than I did, though. I am very weak and ill, and your wonderful kindness has, I will confess, discomposed me. Will you do something for me?”

“Is there anything I would not?” said Lord Hatterleigh.

“I want you to go to the ‘Lord Warden,’ and ask if any one is waiting for me there. Lest you should be puzzled, I must tell you that I had persuaded the captain to come in close enough to land me here. I thought that Chatham, or even London, would not do so well under the circumstances. We have all had to land here, as you see.”

Lord Hatterleigh's face grew pensive, but rapidly began to brighten again.

“It is well as it is,” he said. “I was beginning to get uneasy at what seemed to me an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances: now I see it was designed. You asked me if I would

go to the 'Lord Warden' for you with an inquiry. I can answer that inquiry for you, and the answer is 'Yes.'"

Nothing more worth mentioning was said. The special train, with the wounded soldiers, moved away, leaving General Hilton, with Lord and Lady Hatterleigh, standing on the pier. There were a few feeble cheers as the carriages moved on, and a few wasted hands were waved towards the kind and gentle general, who, in all his own agonies, had crept about from deck to deck, to see to the wants of the strange soldiers who had been committed to his care.

Then the three walked to the hotel; and Hilton soon was alone in his rooms, lying on a sofa, watching the door, waiting eagerly for each footfall on the corridor. But no footfall came, and after a time he turned from the door, and buried his face in his hands.

There was no footfall in the corridor, and he never heard the door open; but after a time he was aware of a presence in the room, and he said, "Is it you?"

And a voice answered, "George!"

"Maria, come to me—oh, Maria, come to me! I have been through one hell of blood, ferocity, and doubt about the righteousness of my cause; and since then through another of physical agony, of ghastly remorse, of wild triumph. Ever since I lost my arm, and the fever came on me, and brought me to what you see, there has been a devil dancing before me, and crying, 'On which side is the Dacoitee? On which side is the Dacoitee?—on theirs or on yours?' Come to me, and drive him away. Come to me, and never leave me again!"

And so she came to him; for there was no cloud between them now. Lord Hatterleigh, coming in later, found the wild mournful look gone from his face, and the old Hilton of last year, smiling and happy, before him. "We will come to you at Grimwood after our honeymoon, Hatterleigh," he said—a promise which was fulfilled before two happy months had rolled past.

Leighton Court, Berry Morecombe (otherwise Poyntz Castle), Hoxworthy of the Downes's, and Grimwood of the Hatterleigh's, and a new one—Ewbank, the residence of General and Mrs. Hilton—are very charming country-houses, somewhat too far from London perhaps, but still very charming indeed, whose history for eighteen months seemed to be worth the telling. Their present occupants are in possession of health and happiness, apparently unclouded.

In conclusion let me say, using far more beautiful words than any which I could write :—

“ In vertue and in holy almesse dede,
They liven alle, and never asonder wende,
Till deth departeth hem this lif they lede.
And fareth now wel, my tale is at an ende,
Now Jesu Christ, that of His might may send
Joye after wo, governe us in His grace,
And kepe us alle that ben in this place.”

THE END.

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